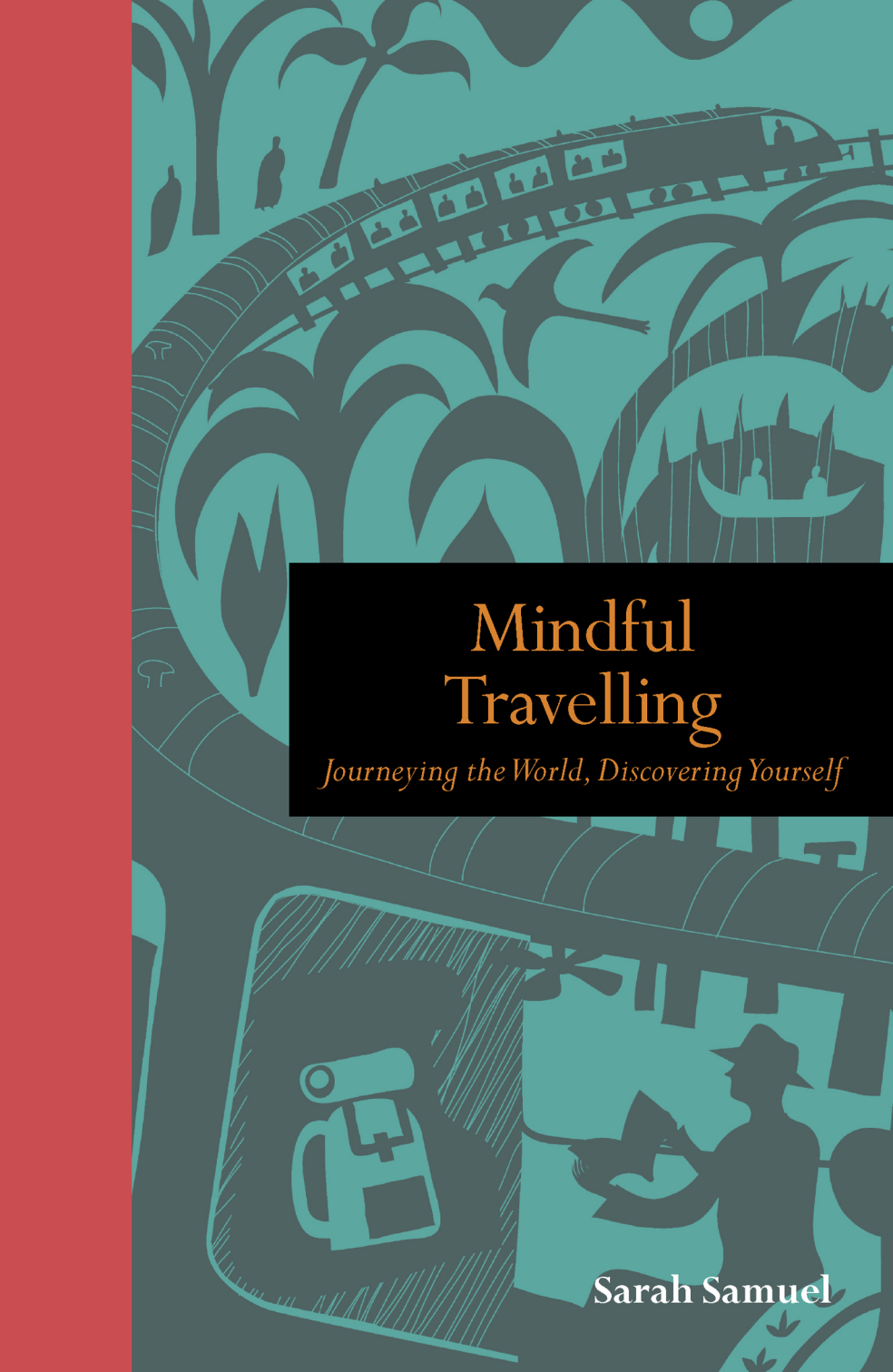
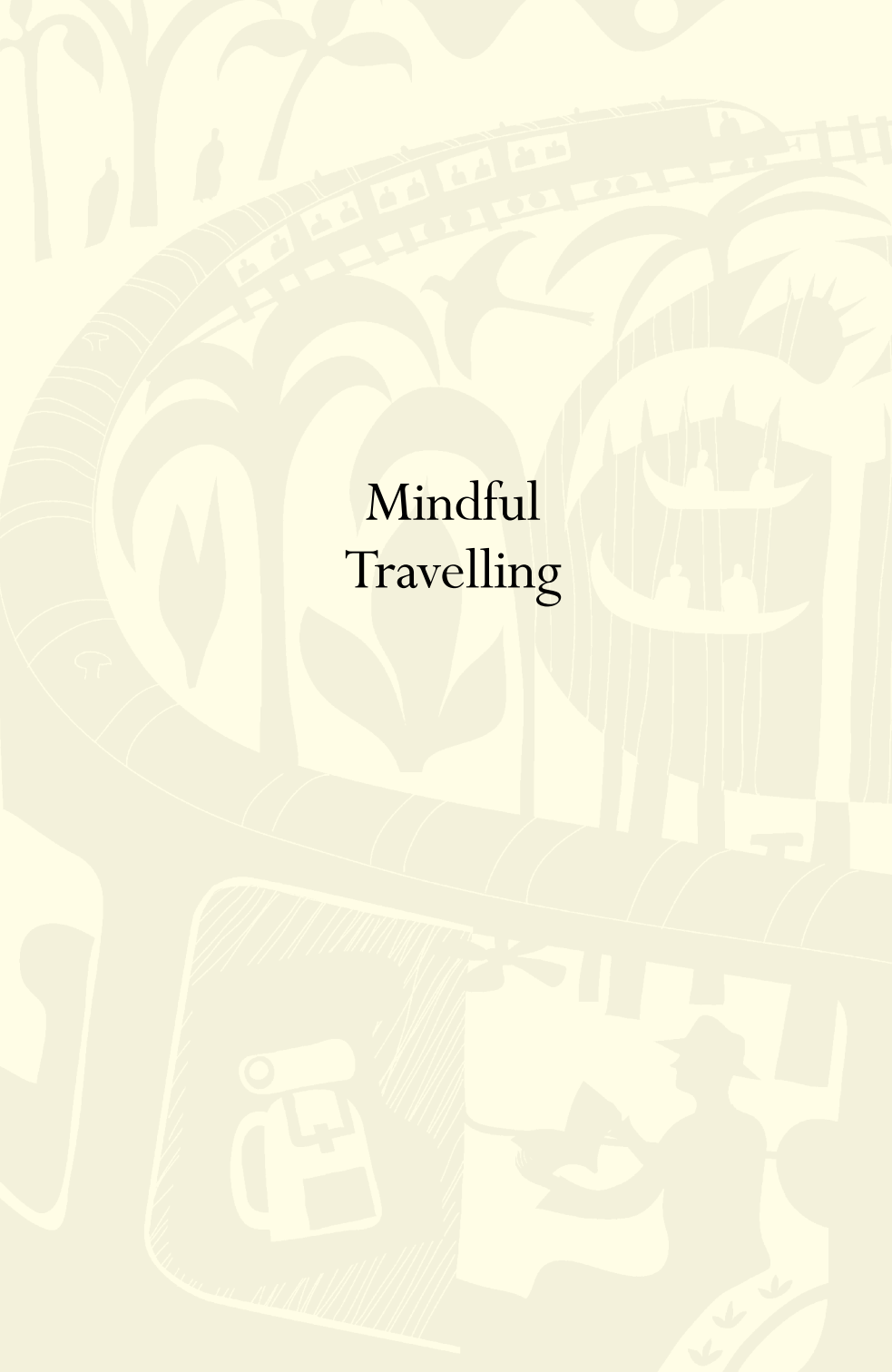


The background is a stylized, monochromatic illustration in shades of teal and grey. It depicts a tropical scene with a train crossing a bridge over a body of water. Palm trees are scattered throughout the landscape. In the foreground, a person wearing a hat and holding a camera is visible, suggesting a traveler. The overall style is graphic and artistic.

Mindful Travelling

Journeying the World, Discovering Yourself

Sarah Samuel



Mindful Travelling

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INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness happens effortlessly when we travel. When we take time to step away from our daily routines to enter new surroundings, we naturally become more present. We open up to the exciting and the unknown, forced to pay attention as our senses respond to new stimuli — be it witnessing unusual landscapes, tasting exotic foods or watching local people. As we effortlessly respond to the now, we also open up to different aspects of ourselves, expanding our appreciation of not just the world around us, but the world within us, and the joy of being alive.





TRAVELLING THE WORLD, FEELING ALIVE

We live in an awe-inspiring world. If I stop for a moment to ponder the myriad of landscapes, cities and cultures that I could potentially visit, I feel like a child in an Aladdin's cave of wonders. It fills me with a sense of possibility, excitement and freedom.

TRAVELLING IS A FEAST FOR THE SENSES, giving us the opportunity to explore and find something new and exciting every day. There is a plethora of possible destinations to choose from – palm-lined beaches with turquoise waters, jagged mountain ranges and plunging gorges, bustling cities with vibrant markets, tropical jungles and barren deserts. There are Buddhist temples, skyscrapers and medieval hilltop villages. There are people of different languages and cultures, and cuisines with an array of flavours and scents.

When we transport ourselves from one culture to another we naturally become observers, able to bring stillness into the hustle and bustle of the world around us. Our senses become heightened as we respond to new sounds, smells and sights.

The Perfect Trip

Now, more than ever before, people from all walks of life are taking the opportunity to travel. Modern media enables us to find out anything we want to know about most places in the world – how to get there, where to stay, what to do, where to



‘All journeys have secret destinations of which
the traveller is unaware.’

FROM ‘HASIDISM AND MODERN MAN’
MARTIN BUBER

eat. We can buy flights and book hotel rooms in an instant. Other travellers’ reviews verify these places so that we know what to expect and enable us to tailor-make our perfect trip.

Wonderful as these resources are, the perfect trip cannot be found in a guidebook, map or web page. The perfect trip is found in the ability to be open and present to all we experience, and it is often the unplanned experiences that delight us the most, from chance encounters with friendly local people to the hidden nooks we find when we get lost.

Connection with What Makes Us Feel Alive

Above all, travelling is really about connection. By taking ourselves out of our ordinary daily lives, to connect with loved ones, with the Earth or with ourselves, we gain perspective on our own life and what is important to us. In the awareness of each stage of travelling, be it the patience that is required to board a plane, or the appreciation of sinking our teeth into a ripe, sun-warmed fig, we shake up the mundaneness inside ourselves, so that our lives become broader and our knowledge of self deeper.



A common misconception about mindfulness is that its purpose is to help us feel more relaxed and happy. This is only a half-truth. In our awareness of all that is, we disrupt the status quo, confronting aspects of ourselves and the world around us that we would otherwise prefer to avoid. Our world is both a beautiful, miraculous place and a heart-wrenching, unjust place. We cannot shut ourselves off from one and feel only the other. Travelling with an open heart, we embrace both the pain and joy of the world and our lives.

About This Book

This book is not so much about *where* to travel to as it is about *how* and *why* to travel, so that travelling becomes a joyful and life-enhancing experience. It is about how to be open, curious

Travelling with an open heart, we embrace both the pain and joy of our world and our lives

and present as you step into the new and unknown, letting go of the need to plan and control. My intention is to inspire you to embrace the sense of freedom that goes with leaving

your home behind to step onto the open road with a myriad of possibilities and exciting potential.

You will be encouraged to step beyond your comfort zone to exciting experiences that allow you to feel your edges and as a consequence feel fully alive; to contemplate what it is that draws you to certain places and people; and to consider how,



INTRODUCTION

by travelling, you can learn more about yourself beyond your own culture and conditioned self. I suggest ways to confront the many challenges we may face when we travel, and how to embrace a world (and our own lives) that can be full of paradoxes. I explore what it means to embrace the richness and diversity of life, whilst at the same time feeling the unity of being human. And lastly, I give ideas about how to bring the experience of travelling back home with you – staying open, curious and present to all that is in your daily life.





CHAPTER ONE



A MINDFUL APPROACH TO TRAVELLING

Paradoxically, our ability to enjoy travelling is determined by our ability to be still. Not until we are able to be fully present in a place, can we fully appreciate it. Leaving our homes behind can bring anxiety and a sense of vulnerability, but beyond this is the opportunity for us to witness and be part of the world's natural, cultural and architectural wonders, which jolt us into the present moment and give us perspective on our own lives. If we allow it, we begin to connect more deeply with the awe of life, and the sense of aliveness that ensues.





SEEING WITH THE RIGHT EYES

I have always been fascinated by the ability to be transported from my familiar surroundings to seemingly new worlds, where my perception and knowledge of the world as I know it is constantly reinvented and delighted.

YET, WHETHER ONE IS FORTUNATE ENOUGH to experience the elemental landscapes of Iceland, the sacred stupas of Myanmar, the misty glens of Scotland or the buzzing sidewalks of New York, our ability to appreciate where we are ultimately depends on our outlook on life and how we are feeling inside. Take an angry person anywhere, and the food will never be good enough, the journey never smooth enough and the people never friendly enough. We may travel to get away from it all but wherever we go, we take ourselves.

When we experience anything new, our minds are abuzz, stirring our emotions. As we interpret, imagine, expect, yearn and reflect, we bring ourselves to what surrounds us. Our experience depends on all that we bring to it – memories, feelings, bodily sensations and thoughts. If we want to enhance

‘We do not see things as they are.

We see things as we are.’

ANONYMOUS



our experience, we need to bring awareness to how we are in each moment. This may be a tall order, but by bringing awareness to all that we are, we have the opportunity to change it. This is what mindfulness is. When we are curious and accepting of what is, we open ourselves up to new possibilities.

Opening Our Eyes to the World Around and In Us

When we adopt a mindful approach to travelling we set the intention to be more aware of what is going on inside us, and around us, and in doing so to understand how we see the world through our own eyes. We discover more about our unique relationship with the world – what draws our attention, what stimulates us and what we dislike. We also become more aware of our own feelings and emotions, and how this affects our interpretation of the world and our experiences.

Our ability to really appreciate where we are, at any given moment, is really down to our ability to be still. The moments of travel that are the most vivid in my memory are those moments when what was going on inside me – be it anger, excitement, joy or sadness – settled down and I was able to be completely present with what was around me. This could be giving my full attention to a flower, with its textures, colours and scent, or sitting on the side of a hill, taking in the view of the valley below and the surrounding peaks. In the stillness, I become part of the scene, connected to all that is, simultaneously aware of my own response to it. These are the



moments that we can hold onto forever and re-enter in our memories time and time again. These are the moments that remind us of our ultimate connection to all that is.

When we enter stillness, we naturally become a more conscious observer of all that is. When we let go of the need to change anything, we can acknowledge and accept things as they are, opening up to all that is around us and what naturally arises within us. While we are travelling, it is this sense of stillness that will also sustain us through the trickier times, holding onto the trust that the stillness remains and can be found if we give it a chance. Whilst sounding simple, it takes practice to be aware of thought and let it go, and this is why many begin with meditation.

Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation generally involves sitting or walking somewhere that is free of distractions in order to focus on the sounds, sights and smells of our surroundings, or to focus within, perhaps on our breath or a mantra. Thoughts may pop up and begin to take over, as is a habitual pattern for many, but the focus on the breath or a mantra helps to bring us back into the present moment. As we become more aware of the now, letting go of our thoughts, we allow ourselves to sense and feel more fully, and naturally become more curious about what we are experiencing. When we apply this approach to anything in our lives, our experience is enhanced and deepens.



MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

BEING STILL



As you sit reading this book, allow yourself five minutes to be still. Make yourself comfortable, preferably sitting in a space with few distractions. This may be seated at a desk or an armchair, or cross-legged on the floor.

- Close your eyes and bring your awareness to your breath. Allow your breath to simply be as it is. Follow its rise and fall, resisting any urge to change it. Simply notice how it is.
- Thoughts may come in that pull you away from this awareness. If they do, gently keep coming back to your breath.
- After a minute or so, sense the shift in your being as a result of doing this exercise. Are you more grounded or calmer? Do you want to keep going or stop? Or perhaps you are berating yourself because you think you are not doing it properly? If so, see if you can allow yourself to get it wrong. The object of this exercise is to be aware of how you are, not to be perfect.
- After a few minutes, open your eyes. With a soft gaze, become aware of all that is within your range of vision. Bring your focus to one object, perhaps a plant, a pencil or a cup. Notice the detail, its stillness or movement, its colour, its shape. Are things beginning to feel more vibrant? Had you noticed this level of detail before?
- Every now and then throughout the day, take a few moments to focus on your breath and then notice all that is around you.





‘Mindfulness provides a simple but powerful
route for getting ourselves unstuck, back in touch with
our own wisdom and vitality.’

FROM ‘MINDFULNESS FOR BEGINNERS’
JON KABAT-ZINN

What Stops Us from Being Still?

We are all born loving ourselves, but as our lives unfold we generally lose that feeling and end up believing that we are not enough as we are. As young children, we quickly learn that there are certain behaviours that are approved of and others that aren’t. Most children seek to be loved by their parents and so begin to conform. This continues as we go to school, begin relationships and enter work. We learn what is acceptable and what is not, yet we likely have feelings that contradict what we deem to be appropriate, such as anger, jealousy and sadness. We may also find ourselves not meeting others’ expectations of us, perhaps by not studying hard enough or not following our parent’s religious beliefs. It is very common to go on to spend our adult lives still believing we are somehow not enough as we are, and still needing to *do* more in order to prove our self-worth and be loved. Unless we can begin to feel OK as we are right now, in all our disappointments, apparent failures and feelings of unworthiness, then no amount of striving will get us there in the future.



For me, meditation is the space I enter within myself that allows me to accept that I am OK just as I am, and that all that surrounds me is just as it needs to be. It is a space for compassion and unconditional self-love.

This is incredibly liberating. So many of our actions are fuelled by the desire to be achieving, to be growing, to be approved of, to be making money or to feel better than we are right now. When we can stop, and just be, we let go of these pressures. As we stop for a few moments, thoughts usually come in to tell us that we need to be getting on, we need to be responding to that email, to be vacuuming or to be preparing dinner. Often these requests for our attention can seem very pressing and we can feel compelled to act. What's really happening is that our ego is trying to stop us from being still, because its role is to be telling us that we need to be doing or achieving and that we are not enough as we are.

Our Addiction to Being Busy

I frequently have a list of things that I need to do. Whilst self-discipline is an important attribute, enabling us to get things done, sometimes what we love to do can become a chore because we are doing it out a sense of needing approval, fear of failure or not wanting to let others down. Writing this book for example, is something that I love doing, but only when I feel inspired. There are days when I feel the pressure to write something because I have an approaching deadline



but nothing comes to me. I begin to fear not delivering or not having anything to say. My fears of not achieving and not being approved of crack the whip to get things done, and my creativity is stifled.

Only when I remind myself that I am OK as I am, by allowing myself to be as I am and allowing life to be as it is, whether or not this book is written, whether or not my apartment is tidy and whether or not I am looking presentable, does my creativity start to flow again. From this point of inner acceptance, life becomes far less of a struggle.

The problem for many of us is not that we are not *doing* enough, it is that we are not *being* enough. The list of things to be done is endless; we can never complete it. It is not from our doing but from our being that all things follow. Otherwise, we can find ourselves like an orchestra without a conductor. The conductor is equivalent to our 'being' or our essence, which unifies our doing into something that we are conscious of and that contributes to our long-term wellbeing. We can only connect with our essence when we allow stillness.

Stopping & Reconnecting

When we travel, we may let go of our usual 'to do' list that we have at home, only to replace it with another 'to do' list. This might be all the sights we can see, all the activities we can do or the presents we need to buy. We believe we need to have something to show from our trip or some experience to gain.



MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

TAKING A MINDFUL MOMENT



Every now and then, on your journey or in your day, hold the intention to stop for a minute or two and practise a moment of mindfulness.

- Bring your awareness to your breath, and its rise and fall.
- Sense how you are feeling – perhaps relaxed, anxious or excited.
- Take a look around you. Allow your attention to fall on something, maybe a book, a tree, the sky.
- Become curious about the shapes, colours or textures you can see.
- Notice how you feel after doing this. Are you any calmer, more curious or more centred?
- Feel free to continue with this enquiry or to go back to whatever you were doing beforehand.

If, however, for a moment on our journey we take a moment simply to stop and be – letting go of any need to do, perhaps bringing awareness to our breath or focusing on an aspect of our surroundings – we reconnect with our soul. As we allow all to be as it is, in whatever we are feeling, be it impatience, anxiety or joy, and accept that everything is OK as it is, our experience becomes less about counting and being able to recount what we have done, and more about appreciating the gifts of each moment. These moments are gateways to a much wider consciousness and enable us to begin to follow our curiosity, intuition and joy.



THE MINDFUL TRAVELLERS' TOOL KIT

Some of the key attitudes of mindfulness, such as curiosity and openness to the new, are also the reasons many of us want to travel. Other qualities – such as patience, non-judgement and having a 'beginner's mind' – may be less obvious. However, when we take time to understand the importance of adopting these attitudes, and apply them to our journeys, we find that the world, and our hearts, open up in extraordinary ways.

FROM STILLNESS, CURIOSITY FOLLOWS. What makes each one of us curious is unique to us and is intrinsic to learning more about ourselves and what makes us who we are. As we allow ourselves to follow our curiosity, there is no destination; we simply need to prioritize our soul's urges. For some this may be sitting in a café observing social interactions whilst feeling invigorated by the bustling atmosphere. For others, it might be walking in the countryside and feeling the urge to take off their shoes to feel the grass beneath their feet. Some may be fascinated by architecture and the wonders of human creativity, and follow their impulse to seek out temples or churches and marvel at the lines, curves and symmetry.

If we hold the intention to be curious whilst away, we find a unique way to understand more about ourselves. Taking time to do and appreciate what we feel drawn to, we are led on a path that is both meaningful and joyful, and which may



even lead us towards making changes in what we do for a living or what we choose to study further in the future. At home, we may not give ourselves the opportunity to follow our curiosity in quite the same way.

I have a fascination with colour and this leads me to follow my curiosity about colour when I travel. I notice the rather dull greys, navy blues and blacks on the clothes of passengers on the London Underground, compared to the vibrancy of sari colours in many of India's cities. I am drawn by the particular shades of a flower or the wonderful pink, orange and red hues of the sky as the sun sets. It took me many years to

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

PRIORITIZING YOUR CURIOSITY



One way to explore how we can make our lives more inspiring and stimulating is to prioritize our curiosity. Travel can then become the perfect excuse to indulge in following our natural impulses.

- Take a few moments to settle yourself. Ask yourself, what you are naturally curious about? Clues will come in the type of books that attract you, or the films or television programmes you watch. Perhaps nature, art, history, cookery, culture, spirituality?
- As you begin to tap into your curiosity, write down all the things that you are effortlessly drawn to doing and that excite you.
- Now consider what you would love to explore more in each of these areas. Does this give you inspiration for your next trip?



realize that my fascination with colour, whilst not something that anyone had taught me to notice, was what helped to make me unique. As I prioritized my curiosity for colour I consciously chose vibrant colours to wear. A few years ago, I tentatively picked up a paintbrush to swirl colours onto a canvas, and now this activity nourishes my life, and my expression of colour is incorporated into the work that I do to support individuals and organizations to be more creative.

Compassion

It is inevitable that things will not go according to plan when travelling, and we can find ourselves feeling upset, frustrated, scared or lonely. We can either fight what we are feeling, willing our feelings to go away, or we can be gentle with ourselves, understanding that we have good reason to feel the way we do. As we allow our feelings, and are kind to ourselves, we begin to come into balance. It becomes OK to feel as we do; we can separate who we are from how we feel, and as a consequence be open to the possibility of helping ourselves.

When we are compassionate towards ourselves, this will naturally extend to others and our environment, helping us to be more understanding of difference and more caring of the place we are in. When we come across people who are different to us, perhaps who behave in ways that we do not understand, in our compassion we know that they have their reasons for their behaviour and are worthy of love and kindness regardless.



One of the most life-enhancing aspects of travel is to realize that wherever we might go in the world we are met by kindness from others, keen to help us if we are in difficulty, and greeting us with warmth. These people know nothing about us, but share a common sense of humanity and the compassion that comes with that.

Open-Mindedness

One of the joys of venturing into new places, lands and cultures is to encounter customs or ways of doing things that contrast with those we are used to, such as the way people dress or greet each other. Our ability to embrace and enjoy the diversity of life will depend on how much we can open our minds to the new. If we are willing to try new foods, listen to new music or adapt our routine then we will enjoy our experience all the more. The same is true in life: when we are open to new ideas and ways of being, we expand our choices about how we want to be in life.

Whilst we may consider ourselves to be open-minded and delighted by new experiences, we will likely also come across ones that we find hard to like or accept. I have often come across situations that have challenged me. This can happen particularly in cultures that are very different from my own. Once whilst in South Korea, the waitress entered our private dining room with a tuna eyeball on a plate. As I stared in horror, she proceeded to cut it up for us to eat. This dish was



‘We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty,
charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures
that we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open.’

FROM ‘JAWAHARLAL NEHRU’S SPEECHES’
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU (1889–1964), FIRST PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

considered a great delicacy by my hosts, who were baffled as to why I squirmed. I eat tuna at home, but somehow eating an eyeball – with its gelatinous texture, and being so clearly part of an animal – made me feel revulsion and I could not bring myself to put it in my mouth. I was not open-minded enough to override my feelings; my subconscious beliefs were too strong. However, this experience made me begin to open my mind with regards to my belief system about eating animals and the culture of meat-eating that I come from – one that doesn’t like to associate the living animal with the meat we eat.

Non-Judgement

Hand-in-hand with open-mindedness comes non-judgement. Open-mindedness allows us to experience the fullness of who we are without limiting ourselves by our unconscious judgements. However, non-judgemental awareness extends beyond this, and refers to the calm observation of what is going on, wherever we find ourselves. This is easy when we are observing local people in unfamiliar cultures as they go about their



ordinary lives, which are actually extraordinary to us. It is more challenging to be a calm observer when we come across something that conflicts with what we believe to be right or when we feel something which is unpleasant, perhaps when we encounter political, religious or cultural ideas that are different to our own. Being non-judgemental is not to say we cannot have a preference over what we like or don't like, but that we do not judge it as being right or wrong. We simply accept that it is, which then enables us to respond from a centred place within ourselves.

A Beginner's Mind

Landing in a place that we are not familiar with lands us as beginners in a new world and this can be both delightful and unsettling. Not understanding a local language or how to buy a train ticket can leave us feeling helpless. Being a beginner requires us to acknowledge our vulnerability and be open to asking for help. In Zen Buddhism there is a term *shoshin*, which refers to the childlike state required for learning to take place – one of openness, curiosity and eagerness. The beauty of being a beginner is that we are more present. An attitude of *shoshin* is particularly easy to adopt when we travel. When we see something new and unfamiliar, we accept it for what it is. We let go of any need to know or be right. The first time we see the ocean, or arrive in a land completely different to our own we look on in wonder.



Somehow when things become familiar to us, we forget to really look. We go on autopilot as we commute to work or walk down familiar streets, lacking curiosity, and are generally caught up in our thoughts rather than being present to where we are. In contrast, as a beginner in a new land we notice and appreciate so much more of our surroundings.

A friend visited me in my home town and the day she arrived we went out for the evening. I guided her around, knowing exactly where I was going and my favourite place to eat and drink. It was all so familiar to me, but to her it was the first time she had been here. She stopped every few minutes to look at people and take photos of graffiti and characterful buildings. Later, she posted her photos online and I was amazed to see images of so many places that I had never stopped to take notice of.

Being Open to Making Mistakes

It can be highly embarrassing to make mistakes anywhere, but it is bound to happen when we are in a foreign culture with social norms that we are unfamiliar with. We will get things wrong, make social faux pas and likely get lost. Being light on ourselves and not taking ourselves so seriously as we stumble and fumble – rather than feeling we need to always get things right – can be the difference between embracing our experience and feeling awkward and anxious. It's also a great lesson for life. When we know that we will make mistakes and get



things wrong in life, and accept the feelings of embarrassment or failure that go with that, we allow ourselves to be less limited by fear and more open to the possibilities in our lives.

Patience

Travelling puts us in situations that test our patience. When we have pressing engagements to make, or activities that we are yearning to do, we do not want to miss them or be waiting for hours in a queue.

The reality is that most journeys take time, and many do not go according to plan. In accepting this, and making peace with the present moment, we practise patience. Not only is this essential to our sense of calmness, but, somewhat ironically, when we are patient and OK with the delays and the waiting, life flows better. This doesn't mean we need to be inactive or resigned to what is happening. In being patient we will see more opportunities to act because we are not fixed on our plan and are open to alternatives. Patience is the acceptance of what is, in the face of what we were expecting. There may be nothing we can do, except be present to our frustration and give ourselves the compassion we need.

Throughout this book I will use examples of where all these attributes – from patience to open-mindedness, compassion to curiosity – are helpful, whether it be in the challenges we face when we travel, or in expanding our sense of joy and connection as we open ourselves up to new experiences.



CHAPTER TWO



A MINDFUL INTENTION

Travel is a wonderful opportunity to follow our inquisitive and restless spirit that knows there is more to life than we often allow ourselves to experience at home. As we take time out to connect with loved ones, be in nature or feel the buzz of an unfamiliar city, we also connect with ourselves and the vibrancy of our life. Our intention for travelling requires not just awareness of the places we can go to or the things we can do, but an awareness of ourselves and what we need to bring balance into our lives.





WHY TRAVEL?

We travel for many reasons. We may want a break from our daily surroundings and routine, a chance to get some perspective on life, or simply to relax and gain some well-needed rest. We may yearn for adventure and activities that thrill us, want to connect with nature or spend time with family and friends. There may be the desire to follow interests – perhaps in yoga, food, languages or art. Whatever the reason, travelling helps us to gain perspective on our own life, discovering more about what is important to us.

THE REALITY IS THAT TRAVELLING IS NOT ALWAYS FUN. It can be stressful, scary, tiring and expensive. Let's not pretend that long hours of travel, often at times we would usually choose to be sleeping, is fun. We are more likely to get lost, get ill, have our wallet stolen and experience huge disruptions in our plans, than if we stayed at home.

Yet, in spite of all the things that could go wrong, and the likelihood that something will, the urge to explore the world burns inside us. Our desire to experience the new and exciting never wanes. The smiles of strangers, smells of unusual

‘We travel not to escape life,
but for life not to escape us.’

ANONYMOUS



Tapping into Why You Want to Travel

If you have this book in your hand, you likely know what it is to have the desire to travel. I want to travel because I am fascinated by the world around me. Travelling gives me the chance to see, taste, smell and experience things I have never experienced before. It connects me with the joy of being alive, with infinite possibilities and with the wonder of being human with all our different ways to be. There are some places that I resonate with more than others, that nourish and refresh me, and will visit time and time again.

When I explore the world, I am reminded of the connection I have with all humans, and not just the ones that I see on a daily basis. I know that we are all in essence the same, and this brings me joy. There is no substitute for actually being in the far-off places that I may have seen on television or a computer screen, and meeting or witnessing the people who live there. I maintain a connection with these people and places throughout my life.

Take a moment to connect with why travelling excites you. Some of your reasons may be similar to mine, or you might have your own to add. It is important to tap into this excitement, because we attract what we focus on. I think that is why, regardless of how much money I have or don't have, I have always attracted travelling into my life.



foods, sunsets over oceans make our lives all the richer. We are innately curious and seek to find connection with all that is, be it with nature, with loved ones or with ourselves. We carry memories with us that we can reflect on for years to come. You may not remember what you did on your birthday over the years, but it is likely you remember times spent travelling and events that delighted or challenged you. Above all, travel makes us feel alive, in a way that no amount of consuming or doing can, but through us becoming and being more who we truly are.

BRINGING BALANCE TO OUR LIVES

With travel options abounding, the simple question of where to go can be overwhelming. We need to ask ourselves what it is we want to get out of our trip, and no review, website or magazine can tell us this. What excites one person will horrify another. A worthy answer requires awareness not just of the potential places we could visit, but of ourselves and how we are looking to enhance our life.

MAKING A JOURNEY MAY BE ABOUT GETTING from A to B, on a physical level, but it is also taking us somewhere we feel we want to be on an emotional, mental or spiritual level. We travel to bring balance to our lives, so that we come home feeling refreshed, renewed and perchance transformed. We may sense a lack of fun and lightness in our lives and seek



vibrant cities and evenings eating al fresco or listening to live music. We may feel overtired and need a relaxing break with very little on the agenda. We may feel a bit stagnant and bored and simply need a change, or we may choose to go on a yoga or meditation retreat to enhance our wellbeing. Some people yearn for a sandy beach where they can while away their day basking in the sun whilst engrossed in a book. Others want to stride into the countryside, feeling the breeze on their face. Getting clear about what we want to gain from our journey will point us to the types of places we could go to.

Setting an Intention

The first step in being mindful about travelling is setting out what our intention to travel is. This will in turn guide us to follow what it is we want to experience whilst we are away, and to be more conscious of that as we set off. If plans go wrong or times get tough, our intention is something we can fall back on; it will remind us why we are where we are in the first place. Without intention, travel can become aimless. With intention we are giving our subconscious mind a clear purpose and will find our attention focused towards things that align with this purpose. For example, setting an intention to get inspiration in our life can draw us to places that we may never have otherwise considered, while setting an intention for relaxation will support us in placing a priority on this and perhaps not get carried away in filling our day with plans.



Before setting off on a journey, write down your intentions. Why are you travelling? What do you want to gain from your experience? How do you want it to help you when you come back home? You may have one or more of the following intentions for your next trip.

Rest & Relaxation

With so many distractions and demands on our attention, it can be hard to relax when we are at home or work. Even when we have time off work, there is always something to do, from washing up to picking the kids up from school, to making dinner and paying the bills. The list can seem endless. When we are busy it can seem crazy to take time out, but allowing time to rest is essential for our mental health and our creativity. Resting helps us gain perspective on our lives and opens us up to curiosity and new ideas.

Tuning in to what type of rest you need will help you decide what kind of time away is best for you. Even a day away can give us the space we may have been craving to do nothing and just be. A longer time will allow more chance to open up to the new space created and to contemplate what you may like to bring into your life, or what you need to let go of. It can be the opportunity to begin or go deeper into a meditation practice, letting stillness be the basis from which inspiration comes. Perhaps it's the chance to put email on auto-reply for a few days and let go of work demands.



If the intention is for rest, then the places you choose to go and the mode of transport you use will be important. I love the vision of setting up a tent in a quiet place in nature, but I find it hard to sleep in a tent as soon as the sun comes up, and often underestimate the work that needs to be put into getting the gear together and setting up. Simplicity is often key to a restful break.

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

SETTING YOUR INTENTION TO TRAVEL



Take a moment to connect with what you want to gain from travelling. Sit somewhere comfortable, where you won't be disturbed, with a notepad and pen.

- Focus on your breath for a minute or so to quieten the mind.
- When you feel a sense of calm, ask yourself, 'What is it that I most yearn for in my life right now?' See what comes and note this down. Perhaps it is more connection, adventure, space, perspective, peace or joy. Try not to think too much about questions such as 'how' this might happen.
- Imagine a place where you could be or an activity you could be doing that brings you what you are yearning for. Are you alone or with others? What are you doing? What do the surroundings look like? Imagine yourself there.
- Whether or not the place and activities you have imagined are realistic travel ideas, you have given yourself the opportunity to open up to what you need from travelling, and life.



Adventure

Exhilarating experiences can allow us to feel the thrill of being alive, embracing risk, uncertainty and the unknown. The excitement of a ski slope, a day trekking in mountains or a scuba dive can be an antidote to the humdrum of life. As we push our limits, whether climbing a mountain or jumping off a cliff into the sea, we conquer our fears, leaving us feeling more powerful to face anything in life. Adventure doesn't have to mean activities that require expensive equipment or time spent learning a new skill, it just requires a bit of creativity and a daring attitude. Perhaps your adventure might be catching a bus without knowing where it is going, or exploring a city without a map. As we take risks, we are reminded that life begins at the end of our comfort zones.

Contemplate what activities you would love to try, even if you may be a bit scared to do them. Ask yourself how you embrace adventure in your life, and whether there are any places you are playing it safe and avoiding what you may have been yearning to do for a while.

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'The purpose of life is to live it, to taste
experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and
without fear for newer and richer experience.'

FROM 'YOU LEARN BY LIVING'
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

◆



Following Our Interests

Venturing anywhere is an opportunity to follow what interests and inspires us. This might be the love of food and joy of tasting new flavours and textures that we can incorporate in our cooking back home. Or the wonderful architecture of Istanbul or Barcelona, which reminds us that we can create anything if we set our minds to it. Or perhaps the trendy neighbourhoods and hip art galleries of New York or Berlin that give us inspiration for our wardrobes and social life. Maybe you thrive on learning new languages or walking in nature. Take time to get in touch with whatever is calling on your sense of curiosity.

Wellbeing

Whether you are wanting physical, mental or spiritual healing or growth, there are ever more experiences that claim to offer you what you need, perhaps a meditation retreat, detox programme or coaching week. Really tune into whether what is offered feels right for you. I began my yoga practice after a yoga holiday in Ibiza. The chance to practise yoga twice a day for a week locked the routine into my memory and I was able to continue my practice on my own at home afterwards.

Organized retreat prices can be prohibitive, and may not be your only option. You can set the intention for your time away to be a chance to break routine – to be away from the people who you normally socialize with, to walk in the



countryside or start a positive habit of meditation or enquiry – without the need for it to be organized by someone else.

Gaining Perspective

There are times in our lives when we simply feel the need to get away to gain perspective. It's hard for us to do this at home; sometimes we can't see the wood for the trees. Travel takes us away from our own problems and in doing so enables us to gain perspective on our lives. I value taking myself to a different environment when I feel stuck or overwhelmed. Even if it is just a walk in the countryside, the shift in focus by placing my attention on the nature around me, be it the colours of the sky or shapes of the landscape, helps me to realize that there is more to life than I am currently thinking. Nature, in particular, is a great antidote for stress. As we watch the horizon, or stand on top of a hill gazing at the valley below, our worries and problems become less important in the face of the immensity of the world around us.

Gaining Inspiration

Wherever you may want inspiration, be it in your work, your relationships or the direction of your life, taking time to get away can open you up to new ways of being and doing that you might otherwise never have considered.

I am constantly inspired when I travel, in my cooking, my art, my work and how I relate to others. The variety of cuisines



I have been exposed to has influenced my own cooking style, in the different flavour combinations, herbs and spices that I use. I am fascinated by jewellery, and my travels give me the opportunity to visit markets and art galleries that showcase beautifully designed necklaces, earrings and bangles, which inspire me in my making. As I walk or sit in nature, wherever it may be, I am often inspired. It might be sitting by the sea and watching the movement of the water and the waves. I then introduce this into how I work with clay and the shapes and patterns I use as I glaze. As I observe living things, I am reminded how they are completely present, whether it be seagulls riding gusts of wind, simultaneously letting go and in control, or an oak tree as it stands steadfast in the earth. Watching local people interact in cultures different to my own, I am often moved by how affectionate and tactile they can be in contrast to the interactions I am used to. This inspires me to feel warmer and more demonstrative in my affection towards the people I love.

How Long to Go For?

Travel doesn't have to mean embarking on an epic adventure across many continents for months on end. Even a day away, walking in the countryside or visiting an unfamiliar nearby city, can bring us a well-needed break. Deciding on how long to go for will depend on what you can afford and your commitments in life. Only a week or a weekend may be possible.



With a mindful intention, what we gain from our journey is more about the quality than the length of your trip. Wherever we go or for however long, we have the chance to reconnect with ourselves and others and gain perspective on life.

RETREATS & PILGRIMAGES

Retreats and pilgrimages have an intentional focus on spiritual, physical, mental or emotional wellbeing. A retreat is a time when we draw back from our habitual lives to spend time doing what we feel we need most. A pilgrimage is a conscious journey towards the sacred in ourselves represented by a journey to a sacred place.

Retreats

Going on retreat is the perfect opportunity to unplug from the pressures of everyday life, and to reconnect with your inner self. It is the chance to do something for yourself for a change, to surrender your time to doing something you love, to deepen your spirituality, or to learn new skills in a supportive and dedicated environment. With the rise of modern technology, information overload and busy lifestyles, a retreat can rejuvenate you like nothing else, so it is not surprising that retreats are surging in popularity.

Nowadays, choosing a retreat can be a bit like going to a supermarket. There is so much on offer, and the choice can feel overwhelming. Price ranges vary hugely and it is not



always clear what the differences are, and which retreat would be the best for you. As a former retreat junkie, I've tried many of them, and I would recommend choosing somewhere that will challenge you and push your levels of comfort, but also feels compassionate and loving. We need to be very gentle with ourselves, or the experience can be so overwhelming that we refuse to go back. We can be so harsh with ourselves even in the field of self-development – with the need to progress, achieve and develop – that we can forget that this has to sit on a foundation of self-love, patience and compassion.

Remember that much of the real work of a retreat is in integrating what we have learnt into our lives. The week of healthy eating, positive affirmations and daily exercise can easily be forgotten within a few days of re-entering our lives. We need to make sure we have the intention and support in place to continue it. Maybe join a local walking group or yoga classes, get a mentor or life coach, if you can afford it, or team up with others on your retreat as buddies.

Pilgrimages

A pilgrimage is a sacred journey. It entails living and travelling very simply, and going towards that which is sacred, symbolized by a holy place such as Santiago de Compostela in Spain or one of the many temples in India. People go on pilgrimages for many reasons, but generally to focus on the opportunity of having a transformational experience. Often, people go on



The Shock of Silence

My first retreat, a silent meditation retreat, threw me in at the deep end. At the time, I was new to meditation and being plunged into days of silence was a shock. We weren't allowed to read or write, let alone use our mobile phones, and eye contact was discouraged. This made me vulnerable and unsteady. I escaped with my mobile phone, desperate to talk to a friend and tell them what I was going through. But there was no mobile reception. I plotted my escape. And then I realized I couldn't even call a taxi.

I felt trapped and desperate. Each minute seemed an eternity. I had only been there for 24 hours, but it felt like it would never end. I attended another meditation but was unable to be with what was rising up inside me. I had no choice but to knock on the door of the retreat leader, feeling like a homesick child who desperately wanted to go home to my parents, even though I was 27. How she responded was such a relief. I had expected, in what seemed like a harsh environment, to be criticized or told to put up with it, but to my surprise she was compassionate and understood what I was feeling. She put me at ease that nothing was wrong with me for feeling this way, and that it was completely normal as I was new to meditation. She suggested I go to the library and read. What a relief. To be able to read. To avert my attention from my feelings to something else.



Meditation pushes our comfort zones. When we meditate, we allow our feelings to arise and these can be feelings that we have suppressed. Like bubbles rising in a glass of lemonade, the longer we sit, the more feelings bubble up. My experience at the silent meditation retreat had generated so much pressure that I could not contain myself, but finding compassion and love gave me an opening and release.

As we go about our lives it is easy to become unconsciously addicted to things that help us to escape from unwanted feelings, maybe our smartphones, alcohol, sugar or being busy. When some of these things are taken away from us, as often happens on a retreat, it is quite normal to experience withdrawal symptoms. Emotions can flood in that overwhelm us, and we may decide that we don't want to be here after all. Whilst our intention for going on retreat might have been to get healthier, to connect more deeply with ourselves or to be more confident, it is challenging to do, or feel, what is needed to get us there. This is why courage is needed and why it is important to choose a retreat that is able to hold us through our discomfort, with leaders who act with compassion, and to know that whatever feeling is coming up for us is an essential aspect of our coming into wholeness, not just on retreat but in our life.



pilgrimage when they are at a crossroads in their lives, when undergoing a change in their life's direction or relationships. Others may be in search of deeper spirituality, healing and forgiveness. A pilgrimage is also a great adventure, with the chance to meet new people and see new places.

The pilgrimages that I have experienced have been walking ones, namely the Camino de Santiago in Spain and the Kumano Kodo in Japan. Exactly what makes pilgrimages so impactful is hard to define. Partly it has to do with being away from the array of little details that complicate normal daily existence. There is great freedom in letting go of the need to control what we are going to be doing in the day. Walking a pilgrimage, if anything, is about staying in the present, putting one foot in front of the other and letting go of the destination. The thrill of the open road is that it is open, and each day's destination is not predetermined. Life becomes very simple. A walking pilgrimage gives space to think, space to talk with others and space to be, without the pressure of time or agenda.

As I walked the Camino de Santiago one of the things I simultaneously loved and was anxious about was not knowing where I was going to be staying that night. I might have had my mind set on a hostel, but it could be full, or I might decide to walk for longer or less. Waking up one morning and not knowing how long I was going to walk for or where I was going to be staying that night was exhilaratingly freeing.



No doubt it is slightly different for everyone, but walking for long lengths of time, day in day out, shifts something in us; perhaps it is our levels of patience, perseverance, tolerance and acceptance, or perhaps it comes from being grateful for simple things, such as dry clothes or a bed to sleep in, or from resisting our addictions to busyness and technology.

MODES OF TRANSPORT

The decision of what mode of transport to use will depend on many things: your preference, how fit you are and how much comfort you need, what is available, practical and affordable, and your concerns about the environment. Each mode of transport has its advantages and disadvantages, and you may well find yourself combining a number of different modes on your trip.

Train Travel

There is something uniquely pleasurable about travelling by train, something innately relaxing about a journey that requires no more of us than looking out of the window at landscapes unfurling before our eyes. It is a journey that takes us off roads, through wide open plains, rolling hills or mountain tunnels, far away from airport queues and traffic jams. No other way of travelling makes it easier to enjoy the journey and let go of the destination, reminding us that this is really what life is about. Whether it's a meander through local



countryside, a commuter train trundling through the outskirts of a foreign city or a far-flung trip on the Trans-Siberian, railway travel allows us a unique perspective on the world.

Travelling long distances by train, perhaps from London to Rome or Mumbai to Delhi, instead of catching a plane, is more about slowing down than accelerating. For many, the environmental advantages of train travel are a compelling reason to avoid flying and renting a car. Train travel may also be cheaper and more flexible – departing more frequently and from more city centres and smaller towns than is possible with air travel. Even if you don't have the budget for the Orient Express, or the time for the Trans-Siberian Railway, train travel is accessible to most of us if we consider it as an option. Many rail services around the world offer advanced rates that are considerably cheaper than if you bought the ticket on the day.

Whether you are travelling on a busy commuter train or a more leisurely long-distance train, train travel gives you time to appreciate the goings on of local life – on and off the train – and gives you more opportunities to learn about local architecture, culture and life than a plane or car journey ever could. As you sit, with nothing to do but look out of the window or chat to friends, leaving the past behind and with no urgency to arrive anywhere, you may gradually find yourself letting go of all that has gone and is to come, time dissolving into the present moment.



‘We have become human doings rather
than human beings. Slow down so you can go further
than you can imagine.’

FROM ‘NO DESTINATION’
SATISH KUMAR

Walking

I once was a tour guide for a walking-tour company which has the strapline, ‘The best way to see a country is on foot’. I have to agree with them. The best things in life are often the simplest – like putting one foot in front of the other. Yes, it is slow and that is the point, for as we slow down we create more space. Space to be, space to ponder, space to follow our curiosity, space to be late or early, space to get lost. Space to feel the ground below us and the elements on our skin. Best of all, walking is free, and the first step can be from your doorstep, wherever that may be.

In walking we connect with natural landscapes and the people and culture embedded within it. It’s a very different experience to travelling by car, bus or train. And, of course, when we walk significant distances we become very aware of our body, both its pain and its strength, which is a very visceral experience. We feel our heart pumping, our breath quickening and the ground pushing against our feet. In the physicality and slowness of walking we take our attention



away from our internal thoughts and out into the world around us, helping us feel a part of where we are. We become more aware of the light, the weather, the seasons, the sounds and smells that surround us, the shapes and colours of the landscape and architecture, and the people we pass, and in doing so we clear the clutter in our minds and gain a fresh perspective on our lives.

Walking is a great metaphor for life, in the need to take one step at a time, focusing on what is immediately in front of us, and letting go of the destination. Both are just as much a mind game as a physical pursuit. Often when I am out on a long walk or hike, my legs can begin to tire, and as I imagine the distance ahead of me or the height of the mountain above me, my enthusiasm wanes. Determined not to give up, I set myself waymarks that are more achievable, perhaps a rock that is a minute's walk away, or a tree in the distance. I tell myself that I can stop when I get there, but more often than not, once I reach the waymark I choose to go on. Climbing a hill is a great endeavour, and like any endeavour it fills us with a sense of achievement. We have conquered our fears and doubts to reach our goal.

Breaking down any pursuit into small chunks makes it more believable and hence more achievable. I was very excited at the prospect of writing this book, but when it came down to actually starting I felt overwhelmed and began to doubt my ability to write at all. When I told myself that I just



had to produce one hundred words and that was it, I began to write, and once I had reached one hundred words I invariably had more to say.

Most things that are worthwhile doing in life – building a career, raising children, learning how to be in relationship with others – take time. It can seem very daunting to start something new – perhaps a new business, career or creative venture. By taking one step at a time, we realize that even the most daunting tasks are manageable and enjoyable. It is all about the journey, the steps we take along the way.

Flying

Flying is the easiest way to travel long distances. It is understandable to want quick fixes in life, and modern technology has enabled us to do this in many ways, especially when getting from A to B. It is wonderful that we can fly around the world to experience the variety of human existence; however, as with many quick fixes there is a cost. I choose to fly because it is the only practical way for me to be able to travel to far-off destinations, but I am aware of the environmental implications of flying. A mindful decision of whether or not to fly is one that is based on compassion for ourselves and our planet, and made with as much awareness as is possible about the effects of our actions, both positive and negative. There are no wrong or right answers; it is a personal decision that should ideally be made with compassion rather than with guilt.



If you are concerned about the environmental impact of flying, you could, where possible, choose alternative means of transport, such as train, long-distance coach or ferry, which often allow you to have a richer experience of the countries they pass through. If your destination requires you to fly, there are many ways you can minimize your carbon footprint. For example, you may feel drawn to give money to carbon-offset schemes that invest in environmental causes such as reforestation or conservation to counterbalance the impact of flying, or you could choose to travel economy or fly direct in order to minimize the resources that you use.

Flying can be somewhat traumatic to our bodies, as we move at an uncustomary speed and at high altitude. When we arrive in a place that is thousands of miles from where we started within a few hours, we can feel disorientated and jet-lagged on arrival. I find that as I age, it can take a few days to feel back in rhythm with the Earth.

WHO TO TRAVEL WITH?

In my travels, some of the most enriching moments would have been mediocre had I experienced them alone. Travelling with others is very much about the shared adventure. At heart, shared travel is about forming deeper connections with the loved ones in our lives. Whilst more challenging, travelling solo allows us to see the world at our own pace and can give us an unparalleled sense of achievement.



Family Holidays

Bringing the family together for a holiday may bring lots of excitement, but the prospect of spending an extended period of time together can also be daunting, particularly when there are many different interests. There may be teenagers who are keen to escape to their rooms with their smartphones, siblings who perpetually argue or in-laws with very different perspectives on life. Yet time away can also do wonders for relationships, even tricky ones. When we take time simply to be present with one another and do things out of the ordinary, we can soften and open to one another.

Children love the extra attention that they get from their family in the absence of the chores and routine of being at home. As adults, we begin to lighten up and take ourselves less seriously. Family members get to laugh at each other trying out a new language or splashing each other with water. Joint activities such as games, crafting or sport can bring lightness and fun, reminding us of the joy of being together. Travel can also be a rare opportunity to switch off devices and interact more fully.

Shared experiences of the exciting, unfamiliar, beautiful or even dangerous can bring people together. We realize we have more in common than we think – in getting lost in a bustling city centre where all the alleyways look the same, in marveling at the sighting of an owl or in navigating a tricky mountain slope on skis. These are not events that we would necessarily



Through the Eyes of a Child

One of the things I love about travelling with my daughter is seeing the world like a child, with curiosity and openness – enchanted by spotting lizards, building sandcastles or splashing in water. Children can often be more interested in the simple and more immediate delights of travelling than in the big sights that a detailed itinerary could provide. Sometimes we feel that we should be interested in stereotypical attractions while we are away, such as museums and monuments. As a child I remember being dragged around many a museum by eager relatives, and being more interested in what we had packed for lunch and when we were having snacks than the exhibits. As a parent I choose not to take my daughter to such places, unless she expresses an interest in them, preferring to enjoy activities that will tap into her natural interest and curiosity, such as trying a new language or spotting wild animals. By taking away the pressure to ‘sightsee’ and instead deciding to simply ‘be’ with your child, you too may benefit from ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’.



plan; it is only in hindsight that we realize how they brought us together and helped us to get over our habitual and sometimes closed ways of being with each other.

Travelling Solo

The most frequent excuse for not travelling is ‘but I don’t have anyone to go with’. Going into the unknown is scary, and even more so when you are on your own. We worry about who we will talk to, about eating out by ourselves and facing our fears alone. Many of us are not used to our own company, and solo travel will give us plenty of that.

Much as I have resisted it, solo travel has given me some of my most life-enhancing experiences. Not only have I learnt to enjoy my own company – perhaps one of the greatest lessons in itself – but solo travel has also forced me to dig deep inside my inner resources to find strengths I never knew existed. An introvert by nature, it is tough for me to talk to people I do not know. With a travelling companion I don’t have to take the risk, but on my own I have initiated conversations with strangers and made heart-warming connections.

I once was sent to work in Italy, with no knowledge of the language, and my car broke down. Entering a local café I had to explain in gestures and miming what had happened, to the amusement of the waitresses. They were quickly on the phone to an uncle who was a car mechanic. I was touched by how eager everyone was to help. I don’t think this would have



happened had I not been on my own, and it gave me great confidence to know that wherever I am, whether I speak the language or not, I can sort out problems myself or find help if I need it. It also instilled my trust in humanity. I have learnt, mainly by travelling solo, that people wherever I go are generally kind and happy to help.

Travelling solo means that we set our own agenda without worrying about what anyone else wants to be doing. We are often so used to pleasing others that we forget what it is we

*When we prioritize
our own desires and
follow our own impulses
as we travel then we
become more able to do
this in our wider lives*

really want. If you feel the urge to set off on a solo adventure, perhaps begin with setting out your intentions; what you want to gain from the experience and the type of things that you like to do. This may well fire your will to set

off! When we prioritize our own desires and follow our own impulses as we travel then we become more able to do this in our wider lives. Of course, as a solo traveller, you need to do what is necessary to keep safe and follow your intuition, perhaps more so than if you are in company, but the chance to spend time with yourself and follow what makes you happy is a gift. Setting off on your own doesn't have to mean embarking on an epic journey for months on end; it could start as a day out, which may even lead to a weekend away.



Travelling with a Companion

By far the easiest way to travel is to go with someone else, perhaps a loved one or a friend, although it is also increasingly easy to find travel companions on websites. Relationships are enhanced through shared experiences. It is generally more fun to get lost with another person than on our own, and when we are in cultures quite different from our own it is reassuring to have someone with us who not only speaks the same language as us but understands the challenges.

However, not everyone is a compatible travel companion and spending every minute on a trip with someone, even the best of friends, can be intense. Travelling is an excellent way to learn about our own needs with regards to having time alone and time with others, and it also teaches us how to set boundaries accordingly. A travelling companion can become a pest if it is not communicated how much independence each person prefers, or what each one likes to do.

It's easy when we are travelling with others to end up chatting with them rather than appreciating what is around us or attempting to talk to a stranger. You may find it helpful to agree in advance that you will take time to follow your own interests and curiosity and also to have solitary moments to sit in peace and be present.





CHAPTER THREE



A JOURNEY TO OURSELVES

Perhaps more importantly than taking us on a journey into the external world, travelling offers the potential to go on an exciting journey into ourselves.

As we shed our identities, conditioning and daily routines, we learn that there are infinite ways to be, and we begin to draw on our inner resolve and follow our untamed spirit, discovering who we really are. We respond to an invitation for personal transformation. Our life becomes a hero's journey as we follow the path of inner freedom to find our true place and contribution in the world.





FINDING WHO WE REALLY ARE

Far away from home, many of us begin to feel a sense of freedom. Challenges may abound, but moving past our comfort zone, learning to rely on our inner resolve, is all part of the process.

WHEN I WAS IN MY LATE 20S I gave up my career as a management consultant, leaving behind my comfortable but stress-filled life in London to volunteer for an environmental charity in Costa Rica. I spoke fluent Spanish and was well travelled, but nothing prepared me for this new world. After a flight change in San Jose, now on an eight-seater plane, with vast rainforest spreading below me, we approached my destination. A clearing became visible, with a thin landing strip and a wooden shelter that made up the airport of Golfito. In the midst of unfamiliarity, a wave of nervousness swept through my body. Stepping out of the

‘And if travel is like love, it is, in the end, mostly because it’s a heightened state of awareness, in which we are mindful, receptive, undimmed by familiarity and ready to be transformed. That is why the best trips, like the best love affairs, never really end.’

FROM ‘WHY WE TRAVEL’
PICO IYER



plane, the humidity and jungle sounds hit me – squawking birds and hooting monkeys. A luminescent turquoise Morpho butterfly, the size of my two hands, fluttered by me and a pair of brightly coloured scarlet macaws flew overhead. For a moment my breath was taken away, but, immersed in the unknown, I was desperate to jump back on the plane.

The following week all I could think of was how to get home. My resistance to being where I was, and my longing for home, meant I hated so many things: the biting insects, giant moths that clung to the bathroom door, tiring humidity and a seeming slowness to get anything done. I looked for something or someone familiar to latch onto – maybe a familiar television programme, or someone who knew life as I knew it, but most people hadn't even heard of England, let alone been there.

However, somewhere in my being, beneath the discomfort, I knew that I was lucky to be where I was, and my homesickness could not help but be punctuated by moments of awe and amazement. Slowly, my connection with the family I stayed with and the people I met grew deeper. As part of my work, which involved giving marketing advice to environmentally friendly income-generation enterprises, I was taken on horseback through the forest to visit beekeeping projects within indigenous communities, and I travelled by boat to see remote farming communities, with dolphins leaping either side. I began to be delighted by my experience and my resistance



‘When I let go of who I am, I become who I might be.’

FROM ‘TAO TE CHING’
LAO TZU, 6TH CENTURY BCE

waned. Like a tight bud gently beginning to open, I let the place and people in. I came to love where I was, appreciating the immensity of nature around me and the connection with the land and its people, and I began to feel the strength and freedom of who I was beyond where I had come from. I learnt far more than I could ever have taught, about community, respect for the forest and the joys of a simpler, slower life.

Gaining Perspective

We may be very happy with how we live our life and who we are. However, it is quite usual for there to be times when we feel tired, bored or frustrated, or longer periods of feeling unhappy or depressed, and we may or may not know why. Taking time out of our daily lives is an opportunity to gain perspective and ask ourselves why are we really doing the things we do: is it out of unconscious beliefs, such as not feeling good enough and hence continuously needing to prove our worth, or a conscious decision to follow that which we are passionate about?

Travel shakes up where we are, in the letting go of our daily routines, our material belongings and our relationships.



In stripping away what we identify with, we also strip away that which we are not and open up to who we really are, beyond the trappings of the ego.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

As humans we seek and want to experience emotional connection, and we often do this through stories. Great stories allow us to connect vicariously with the emotions and struggle of being human. We admire characters more for their journey to success than for the success itself. We want to be shown the strength of the human spirit to achieve anything we set our hearts to, because ultimately that is what we want in our own lives.

THE PRINCESS BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON in her mouth who grows to be a queen is of little interest. We want the Harry Potters, Luke Skywalkers, Erin Brockovichs – who have battled against the odds and risen up from despair. We want to know that it is possible to overcome the challenges we may feel in our own lives to reach the goals and dreams that we yearn for. We admire the lives of trailblazers, risk-takers and disrupters of the status quo. Characters that are sensible or conforming are only of interest if they are ridiculed in comedies. We want our perceptions of reality to be challenged, so that in turn we can challenge the rules that we have conformed to. The best stories have mystery and



unpredictability; we soon get bored if we think we know what will happen. We want the unexpected hero because it taps into the potential each one of us has to be the hero of our own lives.

Our Own Hero's Journey

To live a life that is fulfilling, exciting and adventurous, like the lives of our heroes, we need to be prepared to step onto our own journey of self-discovery. I believe that ultimately this is the reason why we travel. We want to feel fully alive. Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist and author, coined the term 'the hero's journey', referring to the journey we take in life to realize who we truly are. We are all heroes in our own life story. What we have to do in order to realize our potential is leave the comfort of our known lives, learn new ways of being, face our fears and build trust and resilience within ourselves.

“The great mission of our day is not conquering
the sea or space, disease or tyranny. The grand quest,
which calls to the hero in every one of us, is to become
fully alive – to stand up and claim our birthright,
which is inner freedom, love and radiant purpose.

By fulfilling this we transform the world.’

FROM ‘BLESSED ARE THE WEIRD – A MANIFESTO FOR CREATIVES’
JACOB NORDBY



MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

WHAT IS YOUR HERO'S JOURNEY?



Tapping into what makes us excited about life, our secret dreams and ambitions, and then owning up to and questioning our fears about these – however stupid they may seem – is the first step in overcoming self-doubt and beginning our hero's journey.

- Take a moment to be still, focusing on your breath. Know that you are OK just as you are, right now. If this feels hard, simply allowing the possibility for this to be true is enough.
- Bring to mind anything that scares you but which you would secretly love to do. Perhaps it is public speaking, or a new career, or to take yourself off travelling alone for a few months. Write down whatever it is and – leaving your fears aside – why you are drawn to do this. What difference would it make to your life? How would you like to feel when you are doing this?
- Now get in touch with what scares you about doing this thing, and write it down. The first thoughts that come to mind, before you start to censor yourself, are usually the most useful. It may be, 'I don't want to look stupid' or 'Nobody would be interested in me' or 'I don't know where the money would come from'.
- For every fear, think of a reason why this may not be true. For example, 'I don't know where the money would come from' could open up to 'I could cut down on some expenses' or 'I could work as I travel', and 'I don't want to look stupid (if I spoke in public)' could become 'My friends find me interesting because. . .'. When we question our fearful beliefs we loosen the hold they have over us.



Whilst for many storybook heroes this means leaving home, we do not have to leave our physical homes to leave the known. The true journey of self-discovery happens within. However, physically separating ourselves from our known surroundings is sometimes the only way we can begin to leave the comfort of the thoughts and beliefs that create our current life. As we travel the world, and open to the new and unknown, we experience aspects of the hero's journey that take us to secret destinations within our inner landscape. The desire to experience life in its unadulterated, raw, vibrant state is why we travel, so that we can experience our own untamed state – where we are free to follow our own unique path in life, a path that leads us home to ourselves.

Pushing Our Comfort Zones

Life is a wonderful, frightening and unexpected journey which we can either embrace or shrivel away from. Hand-in-hand with the desire for mystery, the unknown and adventure, comes fear. We are creatures of habit, resisting change and wanting to stay in the known. Many of us have desires to be more or do more with our lives, but we fear not being good enough, clever enough or lovable enough. We worry about losing the security that our jobs represent or upsetting our loved ones.

Travelling offers us the chance to play with pushing past our comfort zones, without leaving our homes permanently



or letting go of all the things that help us to feel safe. By risking looking stupid when trying a new language or getting bored by putting our mobile devices down for a day we are taking steps on our hero's journey. Each time we conquer our fears we feel more confident and trusting of ourselves, and our life can open up in unexpected ways.

Mindfulness reminds us that life is all about the journey. As Thich Nhat Hanh said, 'There is no way to happiness, happiness is the way'. It is only in the present moment that we are open, curious, patient and compassionate – all essential qualities required to embrace our own journey to return home to ourselves. The best journeys are rarely the easiest ones, in our travels and in life. The best journeys are the ones that challenge us, that disrupt our comfortable lives, that make us feel feelings we might have been avoiding – be it to face the irritation of delays, the challenge of getting lost, or the longing to be home. The best journeys are the ones that we come through with more wisdom than we had before. Life truly does begin at the end of our comfort zone. In facing our fears, we overcome them and build trust in our inner ability to face anything that life throws at us. Whether we have chosen to face our fears or we find ourselves unwittingly in challenging situations, we have the opportunity to draw on our inner resources and rediscover the strength of our own spirit.

Have you ever felt the urge to do something and then quickly talked yourself out of it? Perhaps you have had some-



MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

DO SOMETHING THAT SCARES YOU EVERY DAY



Do something small that scares you every day and you will find that your life becomes lighter, you become more confident, and your bigger fears in life will get smaller. Try smiling at a stranger as you walk down the street, sharing your opinion when you'd normally keep quiet or jumping off the diving board at the swimming pool. Get creative with your fear and explore beyond your comfort zones.

thing you want to express in public and then felt a fear of being ridiculed so you kept quiet. Or maybe you've had the urge to write a book but seem always to put it off. It is a very human challenge to feel a calling to do something only to be overwhelmed by fear. However, it is only by pushing past our comfort zones that we expand our being. What we are pushing past are our fears and what we are following are our soul's urges. When we do so, we open ourselves to becoming more than our rational minds could ever imagine.

Taking Leaps of Faith

The more we experiment with pushing past our comfort zones in the smaller things in life, the more we prepare ourselves to make bigger leaps of faith, and travel is the perfect opportunity to do this. Each person has their own limits



within which they feel able to work and we need to take care of ourselves as we test our limits. When we expose ourselves to new situations and places, we can test the waters to see where our limitations lie. When walking in the countryside, for example, we can follow the route that we know or a clearly signed path, or we can venture off-piste, relying on our own map-navigating abilities, or even no map at all.

This is not to say that we need to throw ourselves into a river if we are scared of swimming. But whilst it is important to keep ourselves safe, many of our fears are not about physical safety, such as walking down a dimly lit alleyway at night or falling into a river, but about emotional safety. We do not want to feel the pain of ridicule, failure or getting things wrong, or to face up to our fears of not being good enough, clever enough or attractive enough. We so often stick to what we know and feel comfortable with, fearful of stepping into the unknown and risking being hurt.

*It is only by
pushing past our
comfort zones that we
expand our being*

As we venture into the new and leave our homes behind, we also leave our metaphorical homes that represent the known and safe. Finding ourselves in a new city we can begin to wander down streets that catch our interest without knowing where they lead. We can feel the fear of going into the unknown, but also the stimulation of following our impulses.



Being Courageous

We do not need to feel safe and comfortable all the time. As we become comfortable with being uncomfortable, we are more able to put ourselves into new situations or surroundings. However, there are times when we can feel stuck between really wanting to do something and just not being able to get on with it. This may be a life decision such as starting a new business, or it may be taking the decision to travel

*Courage is not the
lack of fear or anxiety
but the willingness to
embrace the fear*

solo, or something smaller like speaking to a stranger. At these times we need courage. Courage is not the lack of fear or anxiety but the willingness to embrace the fear. Stemming

from the Latin word *cor*, meaning heart, I see this as meaning that we should choose to follow our hearts over our fears, and this is really about the journey of being human.

Our fears can be huge and often reside in our subconscious; we can experience them as a seemingly unsurmountable resistance to moving forward. Acceptance of how we are is key to easing the hold that fear can have on us. In allowing ourselves to feel fear, we no longer resist it. If we are not able to 'feel the fear and do it anyway' (to use the title of Susan Jeffers' famous book), then we can try to be with the feelings. If you really want to talk to someone but are shy, the simple act of allowing the feelings that arise will soften the hold of fear.



Travel is a way of overcoming fears because it exposes us to fears all the time and usually in a very safe way. Soon the shy person will have to speak up, or the anxious person will need to be OK with the ever-increasing degrees of uncertainty. As we conquer our fears bit by bit, we realize that our perception of the fear is far worse than the reality and we gain confidence to go further. In this way, each challenge can become an opportunity for us to break out of a fearful mindset. When applied to our lives, we can experience huge shifts and find we are able to do things that we have previously found impossible.

‘Twenty years from now you will be more
disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by
the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail
away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds
in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.’

FROM ‘P.S. I LOVE YOU’
H. JACKSON BROWN, JR.



CHAPTER FOUR



EMBRACING OUR EXPERIENCE

As we depart on our travels, it can be hard to leave the familiarity and demands of home behind. With compassion and patience, anxiety will soon give way to excitement. With curiosity and an open heart, we find that we can effortlessly let go of old ways of being as we follow our inspiration and joy to expand into new, lighter versions of ourselves. Maintaining an openness to what may come and a willingness to stay present allows us handle any challenges that arise.





THE TRANSITION FROM HOME TO TRAVELLING

In practice travelling can be quite an unsettling experience. Some find leaving home or moving from one place to the next easy, whilst many find it hard to let go of familiar surroundings and routine. No matter how long we are away, be it a weekend or a year, when we embark on a journey it can take a while before we can fully relax into being away.

A FEW DAYS BEFORE WE TRAVEL, we are in transition between being at home and going away, busily preparing our affairs so that we can let go of our daily routine. Cleaning the house, clearing workloads, putting the email on auto-reply or making sure someone is looking after our pets. It can be a stressful, and exciting time.

For some, opening up to the unknown and potentially losing control of our daily routine is hard, particularly if it has been a while since we were last away. Nervousness and anxiety can creep in. We may try to micromanage everything, packing two weeks in advance, making sure we have everything we could possibly need – sun creams, tissues, favourite foods – in spite of the fact that most destinations will also sell these things. We can become so attached to our routine that we fear not having what holds us together. Of course, it is not our routines that hold us together, and when we chance to let go of them, we feel liberated from them.



Have I Left Something Behind?

Often, after leaving home to go on a journey, I get the feeling that I have left something behind. Sitting in a taxi cab, I have a strange sense that something is missing and I rack my brain for what it might be, manically checking that I have my phone, passport and purse. Usually I

have everything I need. This is a moment when I am in transition, from being at home to leaving home. It is a point of

It is a very normal human response to be fearful of the unknown

letting go – no more chances to make sure I have watered the plants or put that extra bottle of water in my handbag in case we are stranded somewhere without drink. It can take a few days, or weeks, to fully let go of what you have left behind. And the process of letting go can be very subtle.

Anxiety

Anxiety is very common prior to embarking on a journey. We are leaving our comfort zone and it is a very normal human response to be fearful of the unknown. We want to know what to expect, what the rules are and that what we are doing is acceptable.

I am well travelled, yet I experience anxiety before every trip. It surfaces a few days before I leave as a sensation of butterflies in my tummy and a feeling of vulnerability, even a lack of confidence. This often surprises me because I may also feel



MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

DEALING WITH ANXIETY



If you ever feel a sense of unease, or anxiety, prior to or during a trip, ignoring it and forging on may not always be possible. The mindful response is to be present with your emotions and allow them to have a voice. This way you become like a parent to your sense of vulnerability, thus separating yourself from your feelings, so they are less overpowering. This response also gives you the opportunity to access much deeper-seated fears that could be holding you back in life. In allowing our feelings, we free ourselves of them.

- As you sense any level of unease in your being, be it mild anxiety or terror, begin to get a sense of where it sits in your body. It could be anywhere; common areas are the pelvis, stomach, chest, shoulders, head or jaw.
- Become curious about this area. What does the sensation feel like? Perhaps it is tight, wobbly, painful, sharp or pulsating? Just allow the sensations to come and go naturally as you observe them.
- Maybe the sensations move to another part of your body, or are all over. This can feel uncomfortable and you may want to stop feeling this way. Remind yourself that the only way to release feelings is to allow them to arise with awareness. They will pass.
- Now, listen to the area where the unease sits. Do any words arise? Any images or memories? If the area could speak, what would it say? Perhaps something like 'I'm scared' or 'I want to go/stay at home'.
- Try to listen with curiosity and without judgement, as a parent might listen to the worries of a child. Words may arise that you feel you shouldn't say or are stupid, or that contradict what you otherwise are really keen to be doing. Allow them. Often all that is needed is for these fearful feelings to be acknowledged, and then they will naturally dissipate.
- If you feel the need to, write down what comes up.



‘Accepting means you allow yourself to feel whatever it is you are feeling at that moment. It is part of the isness of the Now. You can’t argue with what is.

Well, you can, but if you do, you suffer.’

FROM ‘A NEW EARTH’
ECKHART TOLLE

very excited about an imminent trip. It is tempting to write this anxiety off, telling myself I am being silly and reassuring myself there is nothing to fear. However, if I tap into this feeling and begin to journal what is coming up, age-old fears rise up, of not being good enough, not feeling safe and needing to know the rules, and it feels very uncomfortable.

Our anxiety at being in unfamiliar surroundings may mean we resent being where we are. However, as we own and accept our emotions, and as we create a space for the present moment to enter more fully into our awareness, we stop projecting our feelings onto something or someone else. Anxiety will often dissipate on its own when we accept that it is a natural human response to the new. As we feel our anxiety and are compassionate to ourselves for feeling it, we allow it to pass and be transformed. We find that we can more fully appreciate what is in front of us, in the moment, perhaps the shape of a certain tree and the motion of its leaves, or the beauty of a child’s smile.



EMBRACING THE MOMENT

Some of our most memorable travel experiences will come from letting go of the idea of what the 'perfect trip' looks like. Rather than planning and controlling absolutely everything to the finest detail, if we allow ourselves some leeway to be open and present to what comes up, and go with the flow of our experience, we may find that travelling brings us much more than we could ever have foreseen.

From Fear of Missing Out to Joy of Missing Out

Researching and planning trips is all part of the travelling experience. I spend many joyful and exhilarating hours finding out all the potential places I could visit and all the activities I could do in a particular destination – whether or not it is an imminent travel plan. While guidebooks and internet sites are wonderful resources and invaluable for planning, they also make it easier for us to want to judge our experience over what we have seen in pictures and in turn judge ourselves for not doing it well enough, or for not seeing it all.

You can never do it all, even if you spent your whole life travelling. The world is just too big and exciting. You may be able to see the main sights of a city in a two-day break, but you will never exhaust its charms. If we are not careful, our trip can become an exhausting time of ticking off our 'to do' list. We have so many choices in life that it can be a challenge to know which ones to take and we can end up making our



MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

TAKE TIME TO HAVE NO PLAN



Set the intention to have a day on your holiday with no plan whatsoever, other than to follow your curiosity. If you are travelling with others, this could be done together.

- Begin by going for a walk, with no plan other than to wander aimlessly in a place you are not familiar with, giving yourself permission to follow wherever you feel like going in each moment. Resist any temptation to refer to your guidebook, map or phone.
- You will likely find your mind trying to make up a plan for the rest of the day, or you may feel fear creeping in about getting lost. Notice whatever is arising for you but stay with your intention: follow your curiosity.
- Allow yourself to wander as long as you want until you feel like stopping – perhaps at a café or a park – or doing something else, maybe to go and have a sleep or visit an interesting monument that caught your eye as you passed it.
- Consider how often you allow this this freedom in your daily life. How much of your life at home takes place out of a sense of ‘should’ rather than out of a sense of joy? Allow your travels abroad to be about following your natural inclinations. The world, after all, is not going anywhere and you can always return to what you had planned if you really want to.





lives too busy. And so it is when we travel, too. There are so many potential things to do and places to visit that we can have a great fear of missing out. Instead of seeing this as a defeat, view it as an opportunity. It is wonderful that we have so much choice and that we are free to choose the elements of a trip according to the ones that excite us the most.

There may be great pressure to see famous tourist attractions, but consider whether you are really into crowds and waiting in long queues or whether you might get more out of taking a moment to sit with a cup of coffee at a café and watch the world go by. I once went to Granada in Spain and never visited the Alhambra palace, to the shock of my family and friends. I instead spent my time visiting local music venues and staying out till the early hours of the morning, soaking up the buzzing atmosphere. This was much more my thing and I felt a welcome part of the local scene.

Ditching the Guidebook

Guidebooks can be very useful references, but it is important to remember that they are guides and not the experience itself. I am not suggesting that we do not visit famous monuments, ancient relics, revered architecture or other suggested highlights in a guidebook. I am suggesting that we are conscious of why we want to visit these places. Is it because that's where everyone else goes, or is it because we want to feel a connection to the place or to be inspired? Perhaps in the Taj



Mahal in Agra, India, we can connect with the power of love and the beauty of human achievement, or in Gaudi's Sagrada Familia in Barcelona we will be inspired to be freer and think bigger in our own work.

Aspiring writers and fans of Harry Potter frequently visit Edinburgh and the café where J. K. Rowling wrote her first novels, perhaps hoping to get inspiration and connect with who she is. What is strange is that J. K. Rowling herself only went to this café because it was too cold at home to work and it was near to where she lived. What would connect us more with her is if we began our own book, perhaps in a café round the corner from where we live, not knowing if we will ever be successful, but ploughing on anyway because it is what we are passionate about.

Switching Off

The irony of our modern world is that the more we are connected through technology – be it social media, emails, texts or phone calls – the less we are connected with what is around us right now. As great as the internet and mobile technology are at enabling independent travel, when we travel it is good to take time to switch off. We cannot savour the moment if our eyes are fixed to our smartphones. People are increasingly paying just to do this – handing in their smartphone and tablet to the reception desk on arrival at so-called 'black hole resorts'. Presence and stillness has become a luxury.



The World is Getting Smaller

Whilst it is still true that travelling the world enables us to encounter the new and the different, many places we go to will seem very familiar. More and more people speak English, go to the same chain coffeeshops, listen to the same pop songs, eat pizza and drink at Irish pubs. It can be hard to find authentic local crafts or clothes, as shops sell the same mass-produced products. Many popular tourist destinations such as Venice in Italy or Santorini in Greece are being overwhelmed by the influx of tourism; local people are becoming jaded and there are concerns about the environmental effects. As travel becomes more accessible to more people, these issues are set to increase. Even getting off the beaten track is not what it used to be, as photos of formerly unknown picturesque streets or vistas get put on social media.

All is not lost. This is all the more reason to follow our curiosity, letting go of the guidebook to be a little intrepid. There are many enchanting places we can find that are barely touched by tourism. Perhaps instead of choosing Santorini, you could visit one of the many other less-known Greek islands – they are all charming and unique in their own way. Or after your visit to Kyoto in Japan, choose to hop on a train to a remote region such as the Kii Peninsula to see ancient shrines and eat local dishes made with wild herbs and plants.



I once had a foreign-language student staying with me. She was so homesick that she was in constant contact with her friends and family through her mobile phone. On a trip to London I tried pointing out famous sights such as Tower Bridge, but she spent more time looking at her screen than out of the window. The unwillingness to let go of the known and open up to the new meant that she was not able to be present and enjoy where she was.

When we see or watch something impressive, like a sunset, we may want to take a photo and post it on social media, but such experiences cannot be captured on a screen. Try putting away your device for a while and let go of any need to connect with anyone or anything else that is not in the here and now.

Developing New Routines that Nourish You

Time away is an ideal opportunity to adopt new routines and allow yourself space to do what you may have been intending to do at home, but not found the time. We are most receptive in the mornings, and the first hour of the day is usually the one we can influence the most. Make it a time for self-care or self-expression. Instead of picking up your phone, allow an hour to do what nourishes you, perhaps a walk, yoga before breakfast, writing a journal or making a sketch. Develop a routine of this just for the duration of your break. Notice the affect this has on the rest of your day, and consider how you could integrate these kinds of activities into your daily life.



Appreciating the Small Things

No matter where we are, in every moment there is something we can appreciate, and when we travel it is not just the stunning landscapes or impressive architecture that can leave us feeling in awe and wonder. If travel is about seeing with the right eyes, then the eyes that can appreciate the divinity in the smallest of things are the eyes that we want to see through. It may be sinking our teeth into a ripe peach and savouring the delicate sweetness, the texture of the skin on our lips and the juice as it runs down the side of our mouth, or perhaps it might be the blades of grass on the side of a road, in multiple shades of green with feathered fronds that seem to dance in the breeze.

By making the conscious choice to appreciate what is in front of us, even if we are waiting in a long queue at the airport or sadly packing our bags to return home, we will find something to be grateful for – maybe the colourful outfit of a fellow passenger or the appreciation of the people we have met whilst away. In our daily lives it is easy to go on autopilot

‘We wait, starving for moments of high magic
to inspire us but life is full of common enchantment
waiting for our alchemist eyes to notice.’

FROM ‘BLESSED ARE THE WEIRD – A MANIFESTO FOR CREATIVES’
JACOB NORDBY



or have knee-jerk reactions to everyday hassles like traffic jams, but even in these situations if we take a moment to be mindful we will find something to get curious about. When we allow these moments to pepper our day we find they add up to make a more pleasurable life.

The World's Greatest View

As a child, I remember travelling from England to India to visit relatives, and I would always be eager to board the plane, desperate for a window seat. I would sit for hours gazing out of the window as we crossed Scandinavia and then Russia, over sweeping snowy plains with houses dotted here and there, vast rivers and dramatic mountain ranges. I was in awe at our world and how seemingly small it appeared in front of my eyes, wondering what life was like in the homes that I was flying over, where the trucks were going and how it would look if I were there on the ground.

Train or plane, car or boat, I always choose a window seat. On a plane, I have marvelled at views of the snowy mountains of Greenland, the Grand Canyon and the Swiss Alps, but often I forget to appreciate the less dramatic pleasures of looking out of the window while sitting on a commuter train to London. As I lift my head from my smartphone to simply gaze at the passing trees and fields I am reminded that external perspective brings internal perspective, taking us out of our heads and into our being.



Recording & Expressing Your Experience

Time away can be a great opportunity to experiment with our creativity, giving us the time to express the world as we experience it, whether through writing, sketching, painting, making videos or taking photographs. There are many ways to record our myriad of feelings and sensations. How we see the world is unique to us, and as we notice our inner response to our experience we can express this in a way that is unique to us. The key is to tap into how we naturally feel, and to use mediums of communication that align with this.

Inspiration often strikes when I least expect it. One of the great things about having my smartphone with me wherever I go is that it incorporates a camera and a notebook, and I can jot down thoughts or take photos of anything that inspires me. (I do, however, have to be mindful of not getting drawn into everything else my phone can do.)

It can be very compelling to take photos or videos everywhere we go, often uploading them to social media sites in an attempt to hold on to the experience or share what is going on with our friends. In effect what we do, when we choose to video or photograph every experience, is to stop being present with what is going on because our focus is lost in what we are trying to do. We then lose the magic of the moment. Perhaps whilst in the countryside you spot a wild deer: rather than immediately getting your camera out, choose to stop to appreciate the beauty in its eyes, its subtle movements and the



shades and texture of its fur. These moments are timeless; they speak to us in many more ways than a photo could and are recorded in our being for years to come.

There is a difference between recording or expressing your experience creatively, as a result of having been fully present to it and then feeling inspired to convey this, and believing that if our experience isn't recorded it doesn't count. Sure, take a photo here and there that you can look at when you get home, but let the memory of it be how you actually lived it.

DEALING WITH CHALLENGES

When things are going according to plan and we are relishing our experience it is easy to accept that all is well, but when things aren't going so well, it can be hard to trust in the present moment. We tell ourselves that this should not be happening to us and that things should be different.

WE CAN HAVE A TENDENCY TO JUDGE an experience as being good or bad, depending on whether we believe it to be going well or not. However, the story we tell ourselves about a situation may be quite different to what the ultimate reality of that situation is. There is an old Taoist story I like that relates to this.

There was once an old farmer who had worked his farm for many years. One day his horse ran away. Hearing the



news, his neighbours came to visit. ‘That’s bad luck,’ they said sympathetically. ‘We’ll see,’ the farmer replied. The next day the horse returned, bringing with it two other wild horses. ‘How wonderful,’ the neighbours pronounced, ‘not only did you get your horse back, but you received two more.’ ‘We’ll see,’ replied the farmer. The following day, the farmer’s son tried to ride one of the horses, but he was thrown and broke his leg. The neighbours arrived to tell him how sorry they were. ‘We’ll see,’ said the farmer. The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men for the army. Seeing that the son’s leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbours congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out. ‘We’ll see,’ said the farmer.

Delays

It is infuriating to seemingly waste time on missed trains, delayed planes and traffic jams. We all desire a quick and challenge-free journey, where we get to our destination without problems and on time. As with life, our plans do not always work out as smoothly as we would like. I have a tendency to take the ‘if-only’ approach, as in, ‘If only I had checked my phone for traffic delays, I would have taken another route’. Hindsight is wonderful, but it doesn’t really help in the midst of a traffic jam and only serves to fuel my irritation. The reality is that there are many things that happen to us in life that we cannot change. We can only change our response.



I recently found myself potentially missing my train on my way to a city break. My daughter and I had missed one bus to the train station and the next was going very slowly. I grew increasingly irritated at the crawling bus, the traffic lights that always turned red, the driver seemingly taunting me by chatting with customers for too long. ‘Get on with it!’ I shouted silently in my head. My frustrated thoughts went over all the

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

FINDING PEACE WHEN THINGS GO WRONG



This exercise is one to be done when things are not going according to plan, on a journey or in life – perhaps missing a train, the weather disrupting your day or a friend letting you down.

- Take a moment to feel what is coming up for you, perhaps irritation, disappointment, fear or loneliness.
- Allow yourself to focus on this feeling rather than any mental dialogue about why or who is to blame.
- Follow the feeling, letting it expand as much as you can. If you can, feel free to make any noises or movements that go with this, like clenching your fists or jaw, or making gruff sounds.
- Give the feeling a voice. What is it saying? Or shouting? Or crying? Either write this down if you can, or allow it to express itself in your head. Try to not restrict or censor yourself.
- Notice how you feel after doing this. You may be ashamed of the extent at which you felt this so-called negative emotion. You may feel relief. You may feel both.



precious time that we were missing out on at our destination, my plans dissolving before they had started. Disappointment. ‘Surely I should be more mindful about this,’ I told myself. Yet peace with the moment was the last thing I felt. Telling myself to focus on my breath and come into the present moment was even more irritating, and impossible anyway. I couldn’t let go, or was it that I did not want to let go?

Sometimes we remain steadfast that life has to go according to our plan, and if it doesn’t then something is wrong or someone is to blame. It is rather a rigid standpoint. If, however, I choose to let go of the need for things to go my way, I admit that I am not in control over what might happen and accept that maybe there are other ways forward.

Crossing the bridge between feelings of irritation to feelings of peace, is not easy. But with the willingness to let go of how we planned things to be, we can be with what is, and in this case it was being with my irritation and disappointment on my bus journey. I began allowing the voice of irritation. It became particularly irrational. ‘Why are you wasting my time, you stupid bus driver?’ I thought. ‘I was so looking

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‘We are each of us a wise guru
in charge of a mental patient.’

JAMIE CATTO (1968–),
EMMY-AWARD-WINNING MUSICIAN AND SPIRITUAL TEACHER

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forward to my weekend away. How dare that woman not have her bus ticket to hand and rummage around in her handbag as everyone on the bus waits for her. This was not my plan. We should be sitting happily on our train by now. On time.’ As I allowed the seemingly irrational voices to express themselves, I noticed that I was feeling calmer. There was something very cathartic about allowing myself to be a hot-headed idiot.

As I began to calm down, I noticed part of me wanted to hold onto my indignation and blame. But what I was doing, in allowing my feelings to be expressed, was creating a space between my feelings and myself as an observer of my feelings, and in that was an opening. ‘Maybe I can start chatting to my daughter, playing cards or looking out of the window,’ I thought, ‘maybe the day is not ruined.’

Getting mindful when problems arise is an opportunity to let the wise guru in us take charge whilst also accepting that it is quite normal to have childlike and irrational outbursts. When we can be compassionate with ourselves and know that we have a story behind feeling as we do, we can lighten up and allow these feelings, letting go of the need to avoid them by trying to control all that we experience.

Keeping Calm in a Crisis

No matter how much you like to plan, there will be moments when your plans go wrong or you are in crisis. For anxious people this can be terrifying. When we feel stressed, under



pressure or rushed, we cannot think straight and it can seem like a catalogue of things go wrong, like a ripple effect. We can lose our confidence, swayed off centre by our outer circumstances not going the way we want.

Realizing that we have had our wallet stolen or missed a plane, we go into panic, frantically trying to find a solution but catastrophizing at the same time. A usually very competent traveller can be reduced to the capacity of a five-year-old. It can be a downward spiral as we act irrationally and allow our emotions to rule the show, perhaps arguing with our companions or breaking down into tears. The experience can trigger deep wounds of feeling unsafe, insecure or lost.

In a crisis, our mind will often not want to accept the reality of what has happened, and will instead concentrate on why it should not have happened. However, arguing with reality stops us from acting wisely. It is precisely in these moments of desperation that we need to stop, sit and breathe. In connecting to our breath we connect with a sense of calm. Perhaps say to yourself, 'I am here. I am OK.'

Change is Challenging

More than at any other time in our lives, we are most likely to be thrown off balance when we are away from home. An unsettled stomach may not just be about what we have eaten the night before; what happens in our bodies or emotions is also a reflection on what is going on in our being as our beliefs



are challenged. The process can be far more exhausting than we may like to admit. Just as a rabbit will run back to its burrow when it feels threatened, so we too sometimes want to go home and curl up in the safety of the known. We can find ourselves worrying about loved ones or work that we have left behind, unconsciously willing a reason to return.

As we give space to these uncomfortable feelings, we become aware that it is natural to feel uncomfortable during any process of change. In a new environment, we may gain a fresh perspective on our relationships or work life and realize we want things to change, or we might encounter new ways of approaching life, perhaps with more community or nature, that make more sense to us and so we question our previous paradigms. As we let go some of our old ways of thinking, being or doing, it will usually feel uncomfortable. Feelings of anger, sadness, grief or physical discomfort may arise. We may not understand why we are feeling as we do, or we may be unaware of the importance of this inner work, wanting to replace our discomfort by needing to do something.

If, however, we can just be with the feelings that arise, we allow ourselves to accept and integrate the transformation within ourselves. It is often only when we travel that we have the (often unavoidable) time and space to do this. It is also only when we travel that we feel that sense of liberation, a taste of who we are beyond the stories and belief system we have taken on from others. We can feel free to be ourselves.



CHAPTER FIVE



IN AWE OF THE WORLD AROUND US

We live in an awe-filled world, with an array of cultures, foods, colours, cities and landscapes that surprise and delight all our senses. As we hone in on what it is we are uniquely attracted to, perhaps the spicy foods, sweeping plains, colourful sunrises or the hustle and bustle of markets, we nourish our spirits. With our sense of the ethereal and spiritual we find there are places that resonate deeply with our soul. As we venture into the wilder places, we reconnect with our inner wildness, and as we meet new cultures and peoples we understand the unity of being human.





A FEAST FOR ALL OUR SENSES

Arrival in any new place is a blast to our senses. At home we are so familiar with the inputs to our senses that we are almost numbed to them. When we enter a new place, the first things we notice are the smells, sights, sounds and tastes that are uniquely distinctive.

THERE CAN BE SO MUCH GOING ON that it can sometimes feel overwhelming. I find it helps to bring our awareness to one sense at a time, and tap into what you notice around you and what attracts you, and what you prefer.

Sight

What colours do you see? What do you have a preference for? Soft muted colours or vibrant ones? What are people wearing? What is the scenery like? Are you attracted to the sight of undulating green countryside, jagged mountains, barren landscapes or the blues of the ocean? What shapes and contours attract you in architecture? What do you want to see when you look out of your window in the morning? I relish having rooms with a view, so that I am constantly inspired by what I see. It may cost a little more, but it is something I love and will place this as a priority when looking for a place to stay. Lush green countryside speaks to me of the abundance of life, whereas looking out to sea towards the horizon gives me the sense of infinite possibilities.



Sound

What can you hear? Church bells? Waves as they crash against the shore? Birds? Traffic? Silence? And what is your preference? The hustle and bustle and beeping of a big city? The hubbub of market stall holders? One of the things I love about going to Muslim regions is hearing the call to prayer that punctuates the day with the reminder of the sacred. I also try to steer clear of sleeping anywhere near church bells that sound hourly at night!

Taste

What is the food and drink like? What flavours do you like? Spicy or mild? Pungent or fragrant? Bitter, sour or sweet? Notice how your tastes change when you travel, as you adapt to local customs and the atmosphere. I love the sweet spiciness of Indian chai when I'm in India but would rarely put sugar in my tea at home. I have a cappuccino when in Italy but am never attracted to it elsewhere.

Smell

What can you smell? Freshly baked bread? Heady spices? Body odour? Fresh air? A melange of different scents? What would you like to smell? Flowers? The sea? Smell is the most evocative of the senses, and is the first sense that hits me when I get off a plane. If I detect similar smells elsewhere it can take me right back to the place I originally smelt them. There are



certain smells that conjure up deep recollections of my experience of a place, person or situation. The smell of coconut oil in hair reminds of a group of inquisitive Indian schoolgirls I once met on a train. The scent of jasmine reminds me of my aunties threading jasmine through my hair as a child. What smells evoke memories in you?

Touch

We may not be going around touching everything, but our sense of touch is often overlooked. I love the feel of grass or mud under my bare feet, with its soft yet firm support. Sense the difference you feel when you are outside, perhaps with the breeze brushing against your skin, compared to how you feel when you are inside. What is the difference between greeting with a smile, a handshake, a hug or a kiss? Which are you most comfortable with?

A Sense of Place

I often choose to go to the sea. As I gaze out, I notice how the water shimmers as it reflects the sunlight and how the waves ripple, seemingly coming ever closer but never reaching me. I see the horizon, expansive before me and I feel a shiver down my spine. Peace and wonder engulf me.

Our external senses can transport us to a more esoteric sense of self and the place we are in, touching us emotionally, mentally and spiritually. There are certain places that seem to



touch our soul and come alive in ways that are hard to describe. There are places where we feel an instant sense of home, even though we may never have been there before. They tap into our core essence, maybe helping us to feel a sense of ease, a letting go or a desire to breathe more fully. We might feel this sense of belonging walking in nature, sitting at our favourite café or just being in a certain country where the values and culture reinforce how we want to feel. I, for example, feel an ease when I am in Spain and Greece because of the laid-back lifestyle and conviviality.

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

A PLACE THAT IS SPECIAL TO YOU



Take a moment to contemplate a place that is special to you. It may be a landscape in the region where you live, or somewhere you have travelled. It could be an ideal destination (even if it is imaginary), or a place of childhood experience. It might even be your back garden.

- In your mind's eye imagine that you are in this place.
- Ask yourself what are the qualities of this place? What is special about this place? How do I feel in this place?
- Know that you can visit this place in your mind whenever you want to connect with these feelings or memories. You may even be inspired to visit this place.



In contrast, other places can make us feel tense or anxious. Stark or volcanic landscapes can invigorate some people and repel others. Places that have experienced war or environmental damage in the past may evoke feelings of sadness and despair, but we may also feel drawn to them in order to honour past suffering.

Spiritual Places

There are many sites in the world that have great spiritual significance, such as Machu Picchu in Peru, Varanasi in India or Glastonbury in the UK. These holy places have acquired the reverence of our ancestors through the centuries, with offerings of prayers and hopes of blessings. For those of us interested in spirituality, these are the places we are attracted to, so that we too can feel closer to our own divinity.

I have mixed feelings about these places. I believe certain places truly are spiritually special and have great significance and power because of their location, history and intention. However, I have visited many and found that the hordes of other visitors inhibit my senses. Assisi is one such place. It is the birthplace of Italy's patron saint, St Francis, and people flock from all over the world to visit the basilica and pray over his remains. Beautiful as Assisi is, I prefer Eremo delle Carceri, the hermitage in which St Francis stayed for many years, living in rock dwellings amidst the forested slopes of Mount Subasio. It is an enchanting place, much more akin to what we



would expect of St Francis than the bustle and commercialism of Assisi. Immersed in nature, I am reminded of St Francis' connection to animals and desire for solitude. Many a time I have felt the magical energy of this place, filling me with wonder and gratitude.

If you enjoy visiting spiritual sites, you may find you get more out of them when visiting in the early morning or evening, when the light is often subtler and the crowds smaller. Or, like me, you may choose to visit less well-known sites. In the UK, I enjoy searching out ancient stone circles, and recently trekked to one in the midst of the Cornish countryside. Able to touch the stones and contemplate their history, and loll about amidst the overgrown grass in the circle's centre, I felt imbued with a sense of deep calm and mystery.

Places of magic exist everywhere, if we have our eyes open to see them, and they are often much closer than we think. Buildings that are intentionally built for worship, such as a church, can be peaceful places to sit, and get in touch with the divine. Nature, almost anywhere, will help us do the same.

Learning Through Experiencing

Why travel when we can see the world through photos or on television in the snug comfort of our homes? I love watching documentaries that tell the stories of peoples and lands far away that I may never be able to visit in person. They inspire me and teach me about our world. But all too often, we allow



The Joy of Food

Whether we sample pizza in its birthplace in Naples, Italy, dim sum in Hong Kong or ceviche in Peru, food is a wonderful reason in itself to travel. Most countries, and regions within them, have their own unique dishes using local produce with distinct flavours, aromas, colours and textures.

Much more than sustenance, food is about culture, creativity, experience and social interaction, and for many it is one of life's greatest pleasures. We can't fully appreciate a culture without trying its food. It is perhaps the simplest way we can experience the wide creativity of the Earth and its people. If I had to express a favourite cuisine it would be hard, because every cuisine has so much to offer, be it the spiciness of Indian food, the sophisticated flavour combinations of Japanese food, or the earthy simplicity of Spanish food.

Whilst many crafts have been overtaken by mass-produced goods, the love of producing and cooking food is still alive and well in many countries. From small producers in French markets, street-food stalls in Thailand to taco vendors in Mexico, we find all over the world people who are proud about their produce. As we try new foods, our senses are heightened. Foods we have not tasted before may not always be to our liking, but only by trying them can we find ones that are delicious and expand our palate.



We learn about what flavours work together and can use this to enhance our cooking back home, perhaps adding cardamom to carrot cake, or garlic and rosemary to roast potatoes.

One of the first things I am eager to do on arrival in a new land is to visit a local food market, grocery store or supermarket. I love to see the array of colourful foods available, both ones I have never seen before and variations of what I know. Food markets have a special atmosphere as people jostle and chat with fellow shoppers over something that is of great importance to them. The appreciation of food is common to everyone.

By sharing food together we share our souls. Some of my most rewarding experiences with local people have been through sharing food. Being offered sweets or fruits by strangers on a train is a demonstration of kindness and an icebreaker for communication. *Meraki* is a word in modern Greek that is used when someone is preparing a meal, placing an emphasis on the way the meal is made rather than what is made. It is about preparing food with love, for the people you love, and in doing so sharing your soul. This sentiment can be felt wherever we go, whether through seeing families eating together at home, or at restaurants and cafés where the chef and waiters show particular pride in what they do.



the television, internet or newspapers to inform us of how the world is. At school we learn languages, history and geography through books and teachers. To really bring any of our knowledge to life, nothing compares to experiencing what we have learnt. Knowing something very rarely changes us. In contrast, the memory of an experience stays with us forever.

Actually meeting people and hearing first-hand stories of wars and harder times, and visiting places where history-defining events took place, such as the Killing Fields of Cambodia or the Berlin Wall memorial in Germany can move us deeply in a way that no television documentary or book could – generating compassion and understanding. Visiting these places helps us to appreciate how our lives are now, and to cherish our freedom and privileges.

THE CALL OF THE WILD

Wildness is a concept that fascinates us. Stories repeatedly incorporate the theme, and there is no end to the images of mountains, forests, eagles and other wild animals in advertising. Yet our society teaches us to be afraid of the wild. By visiting wild places, we reconnect with the wildness that is dormant within us.

WE DON'T CONSIDER OURSELVES to be domesticated, in the same way as pets and farm animals, but are we, in truth, just as tame as they are? Most of us today live in cities



‘And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare
feet and the winds long to play with your hair.’

FROM ‘THE PROPHET’
KHALIL GIBRAN

and spend far less time outside in natural spaces than people did a few generations ago. Nature nourishes our spirits in the same way that food and water nourish our bodies. The demands of everyday life are draining; we are constantly on our phones, dodging traffic, making decisions, interacting with others. What human-made environments take away from us, nature returns.

As we sit or walk in nature we are reminded that everything has a natural rhythm. There is a time to be still, to play, to grow, to blossom, to wilt and to die and for new life to come. It reminds us that in every ending there is a beginning and that nothing is ever constantly producing – a lesson so important for our lives. As we slow down, we become more present, and feel ourselves here, instead of struggling to get somewhere else. Being in nature instils humility, too. In the vastness of a forest, the open sea or atop a hill or mountain, we sense how small we are in the context of the world and this can put perspective on our own problems. As we contemplate the timeless existence of these places, our usual concerns diminish and we open to the greater mystery of life.



What Is Your True Nature?

As a sunflower seed carries the code for a golden-yellow flower and an acorn has the potential to become a majestic oak tree, so we can connect with our own life force, which is growing inside us and bursting to come through. We may have been tamed by our society or upbringing, but the call of the wild is within us all. As we enter untamed landscapes, and consciously retreat from consumer mentality, we experience a gradual reconnection with the deep well of unhindered energy that is our wild nature.

I love the children's story, *Mr Tiger Goes Wild*, by Peter Brown. It is a simple tale about a tiger who lives in a civilized world where all animals wear clothes, go to work and are not allowed to 'behave like wild animals'. Mr Tiger doesn't really fit in and gets bored. He has an idea to start walking on all fours, which makes him feel better, but the other animals don't approve. He then takes his clothes off, which shocks everyone, and he is told he needs to leave for the wilderness if he wants to be wild. At first, he loves the freedom of running free in the wilderness, but soon he misses his friends and home. He goes back home to find that things are not quite as rigid as before; not only is he freer to be himself but he sees that others are loosening up too. We may leave the wilderness, but when we accept the wild within us, we can be as we are anywhere, even home. As we transform internally, we also change the world around us.



A Deeper Appreciation of Nature

As we slow down to take time simply to observe what is in front of us, we can be overcome by the beauty and wonder of nature. The dew on a spider's web, sunlight shining through the trees or the delicateness of a feather can make us gasp in delight. In these enchanted moments, we know that nature is miraculous, and connect with a wonder for life.

I once spoke to a psychologist about why we get depressed, and he said that in his experience the main reason for depression is compulsively thinking negative thoughts. When you are in the midst of this cycle, it is very difficult to recognize it, let alone do anything about it. Connecting with nature can help; this may not always be possible if we are in a city, but we always have the sky. Sometimes when I am feeling low or caught up in my thoughts, I find it helpful to look up into the sky, allowing myself to be drawn into the clouds and their texture, movement and shapes, then, even if just for a few seconds, I realize that there is more to life than my thinking.

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‘The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be.’

FROM ‘THE DIARY OF A YOUNG GIRL’
ANNE FRANK



Braving the Elements

Weather is a major factor when we are considering where to go on our travels. We generally want sunshine, and experiencing wind and rain can disappoint. However, there is something special about braving the elements. I remember a chance stroll in the countryside when blue skies promised no rain, only to find ourselves caught in a downpour a few hours later, with no raincoats. After trying to take shelter under a tree, we realized that the rain wasn't abating and we were getting soaked anyway, so we strode out, all hopes of keeping dry dashed. That point of not caring, no longer trying to be sensible, was a liberating act of abandon, as we sloshed about in the puddles and stared up to the sky with our mouths gaping open.

In our need to be constantly in control of what happens to us, with all the gadgets, clothing and technology that we surround ourselves with to ensure that we have all our needs met, we lose opportunities to trust in ourselves and life, and that we will be OK no matter what happens. I am all for being prepared when I travel. Knowing what weather to expect is a part of knowing what I need to take with me. However, sometimes being unprepared is of great value, and it is never possible to be completely prepared anyway. As in life, the unexpected will always happen or we find that we haven't taken the necessary precautions to shield ourselves from the experience. The weather is yet another uncontrollable factor of our trip and one that we would do well to accept.



Maybe we need to be a bit more like children who find it much easier to embrace what is. I remember many a wet camping trip, with dashed dreams of swimming in the sea and picnics on the beach, where all we could do was huddle up in our sleeping bags playing cards. It could have been a disaster, and it probably was for the adults, but I loved it. My older cousin, who didn't usually bother with me, was giving me her full attention as we naughtily devoured bars of chocolate hidden in our sleeping bags.

THE PEOPLE

If I was pressed to give just one reason why I love to travel it would be because of the people. There is nothing more heartening than connecting with others, to experience compassion, love and laughter with a fellow human being regardless of their culture, language, religion or colour.

ONE PARTICULAR EXPERIENCE that touched my heart is when I was travelling on a train across northern Sri Lanka towards Trincomalee. It is an area of the world that has been ravaged by war, poverty and tsunamis, yet I found the people to be the warmest that I have met. A young boy was working his way through the carriages selling pens. He stood before me with his hands full of plastic pens. I wanted to buy something from him, so asked for two. He smiled at me as he



gleefully handed them to me. I asked how much he wanted for them, offering him some notes. He refused to take anything from me and said it was his gift.

In so many countries I have visited, I have experienced hospitality and warmth on a level that no traveller to my own country would likely experience. These have tended to be places where people have less materially, and where community is a more intrinsic part of the culture. Encounters like this can help us to better understand that there is so much more to being human than what we earn, what religion we are or where we are from.

I Don't Want to Be a Tourist

One of the things I find hard about travelling is not liking to feel like a tourist, where the only local people I interact with are waiters, hotel receptionists or taxi drivers, and in all other respects I am just an observer of life around me: of the bustling goings-on as people trundle to work, of sellers hawking for business, of friends greeting each other in the street, or of mothers scolding their children, often in a language I do not understand. Fascinating as this is, I do not always want to be just an observer. It is often only when we get into difficulty, perhaps getting lost or our car breaking down, that we are forced to interact with local people. It takes courage to connect with strangers and willingness to face rejection or look a fool as we gesticulate or try a few words in a foreign tongue.



If, like me, you too want to feel at least a little integrated with the places you visit, consider going off the tourist track to neighbourhood cafés or restaurants where the menu is only in the local language. You may draw more attention to yourself and find it harder to know what to order, but that will force communication, and connection. People are always far friendlier than I expect.

There are an increasing number of websites that organize experiences in family homes or with local people. I was recently taken on a walking tour of Kyoto by a local lady who I found through one such website, and it was even free. She enjoyed showing foreigners her town, and it was heart-warming for me to meet and be shown around by a local. The experience was a highlight of my trip to Japan.

Enjoying Different Cultures

The variety of ways in which we as humans have chosen to live is fascinating. Across the planet there are countless cultures with their unique languages, architecture, foods and customs. As we venture into different countries we inevitably come across a vast array of ways of being and doing. It can be captivating seeing how people interact and go about their daily lives, contrasting with what we are used to. In Japan, for example, when travelling by train I was taken by how conductors bow as a sign of respect to passengers as they enter each carriage. In France, I like to observe how friends emphatically



Speaking the Language

It may not always be possible to learn much of the language of the places we go to, but learning basic words such as ‘thank you’ and ‘hello’ can go a long way in making local people warm to you. It says a lot about you as a traveller if you are willing to learn a few words of the local language. It says that you are actually interested in the people there and aren’t just there to take a few photographs. We can learn more about faraway places by understanding the language used there, the phrases and vocabulary. Learning words in a new language means we have to be willing to be laughed at or misunderstood, and we may need to swallow our pride a little, but being able to laugh together is one of the best ways to connect.

greet each other with three or four kisses. I believe our differences are something to be amazed at and embraced, and can inspire us to be freer in our own ways of being.

Sometimes, as foreigners in a foreign land, we can get taken aback by the differences in behaviours that we observe. I once lived in Spain, and was initially shocked at the volume level and heatedness of voices during discussions at social events, believing people to be arguing rather than expressing an opinion. I would rarely speak to anyone with such fervour



and passion; in my belief system, it is good to maintain reserve, and 'nice' people do not shout. As I became more absorbed in the culture, I had to adopt the same way of speaking in order to be heard and I found myself loving my new-found freedom to raise my voice and shout passionately.

There are certain cultures in which we feel more relaxed and that seem to encourage aspects of ourselves that we might feel are restricted back at home. It is quite common to feel a sense of liberation outside of our own culture, and this can be enhanced by the new culture in which we find ourselves. Some find that the sound of the French language and café culture lifts their spirits; others are exhilarated by the rowdiness and bright colours of the souks of Morocco. I particularly feel at home in Spain because of the importance of social life over work life there, which many a time has helped me to relax and ease the demands I put on myself at home.





CHAPTER SIX



A WORLD FULL OF PARADOXES

As we are mindful of ourselves and the world around us on our travels, we are more easily spoken to by the beauty of a flower that connects us with our innate beauty, or the smile of a stranger that reinforces our belief in humanity. We are also more easily spoken to by the fear of terrorism, by the sadness of a child begging for money and the sight of plastic rubbish that chokes our oceans and marine wildlife. Our planet can be a joyful and heartbreaking place all at once. Embracing the paradoxes in the world, and in ourselves, is integral to mindfulness.





THE SUFFERING & JOY OF THE WORLD

We live in a world of paradoxes, of darkness and light, of pain and joy and of love and hate. We have a refugee crisis, and forests are being devastated in the name of progress. Access to schools, health care, electricity and safe water remains elusive for many people. You may not experience any of this first-hand, even if you travel widely, but if you are interested in the world around you, you will be aware of the seemingly unsurmountable suffering that goes on.

THE QUESTION OF HOW TO RECONCILE ourselves with these paradoxes is a complex one. In mindfulness we hold the intention to embrace all that is. But how can we embrace the suffering of the whole world? The answer lies in our ability to accept and embrace our own suffering, and the light and shadow that is within each one of us, and in doing so be able to act from compassion rather than pity or guilt.

We grow up in a world where we believe that in order to be happy we must not be sad. If you have ever felt angry and someone tries to make you laugh you may have felt resistance because you want to hold on to being angry, when actually we can feel angry and laugh at the same time. It is this simple belief that we cannot be both happy and sad at the same time that limits us from feeling fully alive. In travelling to places where there is poverty, I have felt both sadness and despair and happiness and connection, sometimes simultaneously.



‘There is something wonderfully bold and liberating
about saying yes to our entire imperfect and messy life.’

FROM ‘RADICAL ACCEPTANCE’
TARA BRACH

The truth is, we can’t have light without dark or joy without pain. We may never know why the world is as it is, but in embracing the energy within us that seeks something deeper and more real, we begin to open our hearts to the paradoxes of life. Travel isn’t always about having nice experiences; it can be about having real experiences that have a lasting impact on us when we come home – on our priorities, perspective and place in the world. Sometimes we need to be shaken up in order to begin to make a difference.

Encountering Poverty

I’ve quite commonly heard people say to me that they wouldn’t want to travel to many countries in Asia or Africa because they couldn’t bear to see such poverty. Whilst it can be quite distressing to witness gaping differences in wealth, what we are trying to avoid is feeling guilty, sad or overwhelmed with upsetting emotions and not knowing what to do about it. Most of us, quite naturally and often unconsciously, try to avoid these ‘bad’ feelings. By practising mindfulness we consciously choose to embrace them, because



ultimately they are within us wherever we choose to go, and it is only by accepting them that we can find peace in ourselves. We can choose to be shielded from seeing the poverty in many countries by travelling on escorted trips that minimize exposure to the normal world, focusing on luxury hotels, cultural shows, museums and expensive resorts. However, by hiding from our pain we also block our joy.

I remember flying to India as a child and, as we landed over Mumbai, seeing swathes of shanty towns below me. We later bypassed these towns in an auto-rickshaw and I was shocked by the open sewers, beggars running up to us as we stopped in the traffic, and piles of rubbish and rubble everywhere. I was also amazed by how many of the wealthier locals seemed to turn a blind eye, almost immunized from what they saw.

It can be disturbing to travel to places that have much greater levels of poverty than we are used to, witnessing child labour, women carrying babies whilst they work the fields, and all levels of disabled people trying to get by without any aids. There is nothing like coming face to face with such poverty to get us to begin to ask questions, such as, 'How can we live in a world where many children have no access to education, where people die from treatable illnesses like malaria, and where almost half the population live in poverty?' I have always thought that if an alien were to visit our world and see the level of disparity in wealth, where one person starves whilst another gorges themselves on food, they would think



us mad. Perhaps this is madness. In our cleverness at creating technologies that allow us to speak to someone halfway around the world, have we have bypassed our consciousness?

What Can We Do?

We have many potential responses to the question of suffering, and each response is personal to the individual. We can take the stance that this is just how the world is and there's not much we can do about it. We can say that we have problems too and question why we should sort out someone else's. We can decide to travel responsibly, staying at places that give back to the local community, or we can donate to or volunteer at charities that help the injustices that we have seen.

It is commendable to want to do something, but we are still left with the question of how to deal with what we experience on an emotional level. Whilst activism can be very powerful – and it is important to act if that is what we feel drawn to doing – we also need to awaken our own consciousness, otherwise transformation will not hold. Unless we know how to be compassionate, non-judgemental and loving, transformation will not happen, no matter what the message is.

Acting from Compassion

If we visit a place with the attitude that we are better off than the people there and say things like, 'It breaks my heart to see such poverty', we can feel so bad about what we see that we



‘Personal transformation can and does have
global effects. As we go, so goes the world, for the
world is us. The revolution that will save the world
is ultimately a personal one.’

FROM ‘ILLUMINATA: THOUGHTS, PRAYERS, RITES OF PASSAGE’
MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

can never escape from our emotions. All we take with us is pity, and all that the people there get from us is an image of someone who feels bad in their presence. Giving of ourselves is not about feeling sorry for or pitying another, but knowing that in our common humanity we are brothers and sisters.

Whether we see global poverty first-hand or not, we know that it exists. Guilt that you are suffering and I am not, or that you are poor and I am not, will block compassion. Self-hatred, fear and anger can take over. We think that feeling bad goes hand-in-hand with being bad and this cuts us off from connection and being of true service in the world.

We have to start with ourselves. If we are at war with ourselves then how can we act with compassion to others? In accepting that we are full of paradoxes, just as the world is, that in each one of us is anger and love, sadness and joy, we open to our own suffering. If we do not take a mindful approach with an acceptance of what is before we react, then when we sense the suffering in others we will either push our



feelings away or be overwhelmed by them. Compassion is when we experience negative emotions, such as sadness and grief, but there is enough space not to be overwhelmed.

Joy Is Everywhere

Although many people in our world struggle to make ends meet, we can't assume they are any less happy than we are. In the developed world, with all the 'stuff' we have and think we need to have, there is an epidemic of loneliness. Joy is not born from having things; joy is a result of connection. My experience of places where people materially have less, is that

Responsible Travel

When visiting places where there may be economical or environmental concerns, it is important to travel responsibly, making sure, as far as possible, that our money is helping the welfare of more than just the wealthiest people, and is not having a detrimental effect on the environment. Most places we stay at will not be certified as eco-resorts or have responsible travel accreditation. When we research places to stay we will get a feel for what they are about, and when we visit we can ask how they may be supporting the environment or the local community. We can then write blogs and reviews about our experience to help fellow travellers.



there is sometimes more joy. I volunteered for an environmental charity in Costa Rica because I believed that I was going to help those less fortunate than me. What happened was the reverse. I realized that in many ways they were more fortunate than me. Never before had I experienced such warm hospitality, danced so much and been welcomed by so many open-hearted people.

THE UNITY OF BEING HUMAN

As we venture to new lands, taking with us our own culturally conditioned beliefs and perspective on the world, it is easy to forget that we are the foreigners. As we become more mindful of how our experiences contrast to that which we are used to, we can question what it is that makes us who we are beyond our conditioning, opening to our own truth, and in turn meeting others in theirs.

AS WE GO ABOUT OUR LIVES, it is usual for us to define ourselves by what we do, what we have or what we believe, what relationship we are in, what values we hold, what we own or how much money we have. There is nothing wrong with any of these things, but they are not who we are. If I lose my material possessions or change my beliefs, I am still me. If I believe what makes me of value is my home or the things I own, then I do not believe that I have intrinsic value. Whether or not I lose my money, I lose touch with who I am,



‘It is with the soul that we grasp the
essence of another human being, not with the
mind, nor even with the heart.’

FROM ‘THE BOOKS IN MY LIFE’
HENRY MILLER

or my soul. When we strip away the labels that we acquire – status, religion, level of wealth, nationality, skin colour – we have to ask of ourselves who we really are without them. Free of these identities, we begin to forge a life that truly reflects who we are. This takes courage.

For me, meditation connects me with my soul, the core of who I am. As I meditate, I connect with my body, my breath and all that is inside and all that surrounds me. This sense of OK-ness with all that is, is also an OK-ness with all that I am. No one can take that away from me; only I can disconnect myself from it.

Transcending Conditioned Beliefs

It is in stillness, whether during meditation or simply tapping into stillness at any moment we choose, that we connect with the essence of who we are, beyond the labels that we may attribute to ourselves. This is our identity beyond thought, our soul. The more we practise this, the more we feel alive. When we loosen our conditioned beliefs, we can learn to see



‘You are only free when you realise you
belong to no place. You belong to every place.
The price is high but the reward is great.’

FROM ‘CONVERSATIONS WITH MAYA ANGELOU’
MAYA ANGELOU

the soul in others, too, rather than relating to them from an egoic perspective of judgement. As we become more conscious of our thoughts, through the practice of mindfulness, we realize that we have beliefs we have adopted that perhaps no longer serve us. We make judgements all the time and it is generally something we don’t like to admit to ourselves, let alone anyone else. We teach our children not to call other children names based on their external experience, yet may unconsciously harbour our own prejudices.

The wonderful thing about travel is that we take ourselves away from many of our false identities – what we own, what we do, our role and status – and we have the chance to discover our true identity. As we become present to the wonders of the world, we feel a sense of identity and belonging that goes beyond borders and labels. As we travel and come across people we would never normally encounter, perhaps with a culture and beliefs very different from our own, we may start off with prejudices, but there is something quite magical when we connect with others on an emotional level and



realize we have much more in common than we thought. In doing so, we broaden our minds and become more tolerant of differences wherever we encounter them.

Overcoming Conflict

There are times when we feel conflicted by what we come across on our travels, maybe in the way animals are treated, or in attitudes that are shown towards women. It is common in these instances, when our values are threatened, to criticize and judge and in doing so perpetuate a 'them and us' viewpoint of separation. We may even believe that the people we are criticizing are bad people. If you think of many of the problems in the world, such as religious intolerance or cultural superiority, they are down to this belief.

It is very hard to maintain a stance of tolerance and open-heartedness when the actions and opinions of others go against what we believe to be right. I am not suggesting that we drop our standards. However, there is importance in understanding that issues are rarely black and white, or good and bad, in life. Everyone has a story or a reason to hold the beliefs they do. When removed from our own culture, we will still carry with us our beliefs about ourselves and how the world should be. A large part of our belief system is unconscious, taken on as a child and never questioned.

As we become more mindful, or aware, of our beliefs, then we have a choice about whether we want to hold onto them.



‘Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry,
and narrow-mindedness.’

FROM ‘THE INNOCENTS ABROAD’
MARK TWAIN

Travelling not only helps us to be more aware of our beliefs – as we bump up against different ways of doing and being – but gives us other options. Even if I believe myself to be open and non-judgemental, I can often find myself caught out and find I am irritated or intolerant of behaviours that don’t align with those that I find acceptable.

I find it hard when people stare intently at me in India, and it is easy to get annoyed and take offence, when this is more often a sign of curiosity rather than animosity. In rural Italy it is common to keep dogs in enclosures or tied by ropes, only to be let out at night to guard the premises. They are not taken for walks or allowed in the home, as I am used to. It distresses me to see dogs treated like this, yet it is completely normal for the people who live there. I could choose to close myself off to these people and strike them off as being wrong or bad, but the mindful reaction is to keep my heart open. They are not bad people; they are in fact very hospitable and warm-hearted, as we all are when treated with kindness and respect. They are just people who have a very different belief system to me, generally as a result of their cultural conditioning.



Staying True to Our Values

It can be a difficult balancing act: being open to ideas that we may find hard to accept, and yet staying true to our values. As we practise mindfulness we become more conscious of our own beliefs and conditioning, and understand that we may still have unconscious beliefs that are in conflict with what we are experiencing.

I recently watched a film about a couple travelling by trailer from Canada to Mexico. Vegans at home, they chose to eat meat during their travels because they felt that sticking to veganism, particularly whilst in Mexico, would restrict them from enjoying the culture and mixing with local people. When we travel we often have to weigh up our values, choosing to keep the ones that matter to us most and relax the ones that may get in the way of us having a fuller experience. Whatever you choose to do, or not to do, is your decision. I chose not to speak up for the tied-up dogs in Italy, but there have been times when I have travelled where the injustice I have seen is so great that I do feel the need to do something. There are no rules; it is about checking in with yourself. We may well find that by questioning our own thinking and beliefs we find alternative ones that resonate better with the truth of who we are now, as opposed to what we learnt when we were children.





CHAPTER SEVEN



COMING HOME

Travel may last a few days, but the time spent going over our trip, thinking and reflecting, can last a lifetime. The journey we have taken may have given us amazing experiences, expanding our being and sense of what is possible, but it is only through being still that we can begin to integrate this into our everyday lives. For it is in stillness that we can reconnect with our new-found sense of freedom and possibility, and what we have learnt about who we are beyond our conditioning. In this way, we know that the real road back home is the one that leads back to our true self.





THE RETURN

If you have had a great time away, you may dread coming home, knowing that it will be a while until your next trip. Alternatively, you could be feeling relieved or refreshed and looking forward to getting back to your daily life. Whatever you may be feeling, coming home is a transition.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE BACK HOME, it may seem as if nothing has changed. Your home and friends are as they were when you left, but something feels different. Probably you are tired from your journey but there seems to be a mismatch between how you were when you left and how you are

When we travel we have intense experiences that often expand our being

now. There can be a strange sense of detachment from everything and everyone around you. Maybe you notice things that you wouldn't

usually – the temperature, the colour of your walls, how tidy your home is. You may find you are not so interested in what your friends are talking about, or feel unusually resistant to going back to work.

What has happened is an internal shift. Our experiences change us, whatever they are, and when we travel we have intense experiences that often expand our being and what we believe to be possible in our lives. We will have gained

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

MANAGING THE TRANSITION



This exercise will help you to integrate what you have experienced on your travels, and is recommended in the days or weeks after your arrival back home.

- Take a moment to sit and be, perhaps with your eyes closed, and focus on your breath.
- Tune into how you are feeling. Are you relaxed? Unsettled? Confused? It doesn't matter. Just be with whatever feeling arises.
- Now open your eyes to observe your surroundings. What do you notice?
- Ask yourself what is different from before you went away. It may be something external that has changed but it is more likely to be your take on things that has changed. Perhaps this place is feeling alien to you, or you notice the colours or sounds more.
- As you go through your day, keep tapping into how you see the world around you, because this new way of seeing comes from the new you.





‘Why do you go away? So that you can come back.
So that you can see the place you came from with new
eyes and extra colours. And the people there see you
differently, too. Coming back to where you
started is not the same as never leaving.’

FROM ‘A HAT FULL OF SKY’
TERRY PRATCHETT

perspective on our life, and perhaps are keen to instigate changes, such as showing appreciation for our loved ones or deciding to walk more every day. We may even have changed more radically due to our experiences; we may decide to end a relationship, change career or volunteer abroad. It can help to take things slowly and be gentle on yourself. The clarity of vision we had when we were away may be harder to follow through on when we get home, when reality hits us and our old beliefs about ourselves and how things should be return.

It is common to feel lonely when we return when no one at home understands what we have experienced. We bring with us a part of the world that we have visited and it becomes locked into our being, changing us forever. Finding support to reconnect with our newness is essential to integrate it into our lives. Maybe we need to join a yoga class, begin a cultural exchange, connect with others who have had similar experiences or volunteer for a charity.

MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

RECONNECTING WITH THE NEW YOU



When you are back at home and longing to be away again, you can reconnect with your travelling experiences through visualization.

- Take a moment to contemplate the places that inspired you most on your travels. Choose one.
- Tap into the feeling of this place. Is it warm or cold? What is the weather like? Is there anyone else there? What are the surroundings? Allow yourself to imagine you are there, regardless of the practicalities.
- As you visualize yourself in this place, notice how you are feeling. Maybe a sense of relaxation envelops you as you feel the warmth of the sun, or perhaps it is exhilaration and excitement you experience as you set off on an adventure, or a sense of awe and wonder as you stand on top of a mountain. Stay with this visualization as long as you like.
- When you come back from your visualization, notice how different you feel and how the sensations you felt are still with you now. Know that you can access these feelings any time you want.
- Whilst your current circumstances may be very different from those of your visualization, consider whether you can bring elements of it into your day today – maybe a walk in nature, a sauna or an hour to read.





BREAKING THE MONOTONY OF OUR DAILY LIVES

As exciting as travel is, we can't always take off to somewhere new when we find we are bored or stuck in our lives. However, there are many things we can do in our daily lives that break the monotony, helping us to feel inspired and renewed even when we are home.

Seeing with New Eyes

The very nature of travelling generally means experiencing something new and different. Often when we do the same journey over and over again, perhaps to work or to the shops, or dropping our children off at school, we can lose ourselves in our own thoughts. Rather than be present to where we are, we go on autopilot. You can foster a beginner's mind by consciously taking more notice of your surroundings and being curious about the things that catch your eye. These may be things you have seen before, maybe the detail of a street lamp or the leaves of a tree that you usually just walk past without noticing – but you are seeing them from a fresh perspective. Or, you could simply try altering your route, which will make you aware of your surroundings as you look where to go.

Being Grateful

Monotony is the inability to see the good, the interesting or the exciting in every day. The practice of gratitude can shift



MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

PRACTISING GRATITUDE



At the end of each day think of:

- One thing you are grateful for today
- One person you enjoyed seeing
- One thing you have learnt
- One thing you admire in someone else
- One thing you admire in yourself
- One thing that inspired you

You will find that as you practise this, you will be more conscious of creating and responding to things that you are grateful for.

our perception. When we hold the intention to be grateful, we find the silver linings in even the dullest of days. There are many joyful experiences that happen every day that we fail to recognize. People who have been held as prisoners, when asked what they missed most in life, say the sky, the horizon, a child's laughter, their partner's kiss. These are all things that most of us can experience daily, if we take the time to notice.

Have a Day with Nothing Planned

When was the last time you had a day stretched out ahead of you with nothing planned and nothing to do but to follow your inspiration in each moment? Maybe you can just sit on your sofa with no phone to resort to. Boredom may arise, but



‘When each day is the same as the next, it’s because people fail to recognize the good things that happen in their lives every day that the sun rises.’

FROM ‘THE ALCHEMIST’
PAULO COELHO (1947–), NOVELIST

this can be the gateway to inspiration, if we stick through it. Put some music on. Jump on the next bus, no matter where it is going, and get off at a stop you don’t know. Cook something exciting – maybe get inspiration from a chef you like, or go to the supermarket and buy a fruit or vegetable you haven’t tried before. Scribble crazy colours on a piece of paper.

Pushing Your Comfort Zone

Is there anything you have been dying to do but are too scared? Too tired? Told yourself you can’t afford it? Do it! Dance in your front room like no one is watching. Talk to a stranger. Go to the cinema on your own. Learn a language. Do a cultural exchange with someone from a different country. Take an interest in world cinema, art and music. Take up a dance class, art class or writing class. Meditate! You will find that as you focus on what your soul is calling you to do, your fears will become easier to overcome. Gradually this will have a cumulative effect on your whole life, helping you to feel more courageous in all that you do.



Redefining Travel

We like to think of travel as going to far-off places, escaping our home to experience the new and exotic. But travel can be the act of simply going somewhere new. We can't always jump on flights to places with different climates, with people that speak foreign languages and have different ways of living. Broadening our horizons is not just about expanding our physical limitations; it is also about expanding our definition of what is possible and opening our ideas to encompass what is closer to home. We could go to a country halfway around the world, or it could be to the next town. Or, we could simply explore our own neighbourhood with new eyes.

I recently became car-less and have found myself having to get more buses and walk to places that I would usually have driven to. This has taken me on new routes and I have walked down streets that I never knew existed, even though I have been within metres of them many times. Seeing gardens that owners obviously take great pride in, rundown buildings, beautiful buildings – all give a richer flavour of the town I call home, and help me to appreciate it all the more.

When I travel I often find people who have seen more of my own country than I have. I have made it a point over the last few years to visit more of my own country and have enjoyed its diversity of landscapes, culture and peoples.



COMING HOME TO OURSELVES

As we follow a path into the external world we are also allowing ourselves to open up to the treasures within ourselves. This is the true meaning of coming home, to a place where we can be ourselves. And so the longing to travel becomes a longing to come home to ourselves.

WHEN I STOP TO GAZE INTO THE SKIES, even on the cloudiest of days, I am drawn by the seagulls that dive and glide in the wind. Many a time I have longed to be a bird, free to fly wherever I choose. For a large part of my life, I have felt a strong urge to be free. For many years, I chose to travel, live and work abroad, finding a new sense of freedom as I visited new countries, unbound by my own culture and conditioning.

Despite all the enriching benefits of travelling, as with anything, mindfulness is required to be aware of why we are travelling and whether it is really bringing balance to our lives, or whether it is creating greater imbalance. For me, travelling can also be a form of escapism. When things aren't going well, I just want to get away. What I have come to realize is that there is no escaping myself, and true freedom comes from within. Whatever is showing up in my life that feels restrictive is due to a limiting belief that I am holding onto.

I was once struck by a friend telling me that she did not feel the need to travel anymore. Now in her 40s with many



years travelling behind her, she told me how she had left home to travel in her mid-20s, spending 18 months in Southeast Asia and Italy. She described the need to ‘cut the umbilical cord’ from her mother and experience the freedom of no expectations from family or society about what she needed to be doing with her life. In this freedom she had no pressure to be or do anything other than follow what she felt drawn to, making connections with others along the way. In the years that followed she continued to spend as much time abroad as possible, lusting after the sense of freedom that she got from travelling, until a point in her life years later when she did not feel this need to escape anymore. ‘I had developed my own freedom at home in the choices that I had made regarding how I work and live, and in the friends I have,’ she said. ‘I can now live how I want because I have let go of the beliefs that I need to be different to who I am.’

Whilst travelling puts us in touch with a sense of freedom and possibility, integrating this into our everyday lives requires us to carry inside us this sense of freedom, so that whether we are at home or away, we know that we are always free.

‘Home is neither here nor there.

Home is within you, or home is nowhere at all.’

FROM ‘SIDDHARTHA’
HERMANN HESSE



Mindfulness practices help us to become aware of the beliefs we hold that tell us we are not free – those internalized voices of our parents, teachers or society that tell us we are not good enough, that we need to be a certain way in order to be successful, that we need to put up with circumstances that may not be OK with us. With awareness and acceptance of these limiting beliefs we can begin to release them and free ourselves from their hold.

Seeing Ourselves with New Eyes

In his book *The Alchemist*, Paulo Coelho tells the story of an Andalusian shepherd boy named Santiago, who has a series of dreams that he believes to be prophetic, telling him to travel to Egypt to discover a treasure buried in the pyramids. What

Our travels are often a catalyst for discovering the treasure that lies within each one of us

starts out as a quest to find treasure turns out to be a voyage of self-discovery. After meeting various challenges and teachers along the way, his journey culminates at the foot

of the pyramids, where he starts digging for treasure. He is accosted by two thieves, who beat him and threaten to steal his money. When they realize he has no money, they take pity on him and listen to his story. One of the thieves tells Santiago that heeding dreams is ridiculous and laughingly tells him of a dream he had that showed treasure buried under a hill in



Spain. Santiago goes back home to find the treasure buried under the hill where he lives. Our travels are often a catalyst for discovering the treasure that lies within each one of us; whilst it has always been within us, it is only by getting away that we are able to see it.

Wherever we choose to travel to, in exploration of the surprising and new in the world, we have the potential to become more aware of the surprising and new within our being. As we hold a mindful approach – of openness, curiosity and compassion – we initiate an unfolding within. In connecting with nature, with others and with ourselves, we gain perspective on our lives and our priorities. By being present, not only through our experiences of delight and fascination, but also through more challenging times, we draw on inner resources and touch places deep within our soul. And so exploring the world becomes the perfect catalyst for our journey in life, a journey of self-discovery.

‘We carry inside us the wonders we seek outside us.’

FROM ‘THE ESSENTIAL RUMI’

JALAL AD-DIN MUHAMMAD RUMI (ALSO KNOWN AS RUMI)



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Sarah Samuel has travelled the world, exploring many different spiritual traditions, practices and teachings. She has been on silent meditation retreats in Europe, walked pilgrimage routes in Japan, experienced Buddhism in Northern India and Tibet, and lived in Spain, Costa Rica and Italy. Sarah integrates mindfulness into her daily life through meditation and the transformational courses and workshops she runs. She lives in Brighton, UK and is the author of *Mindful Crafting*.

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